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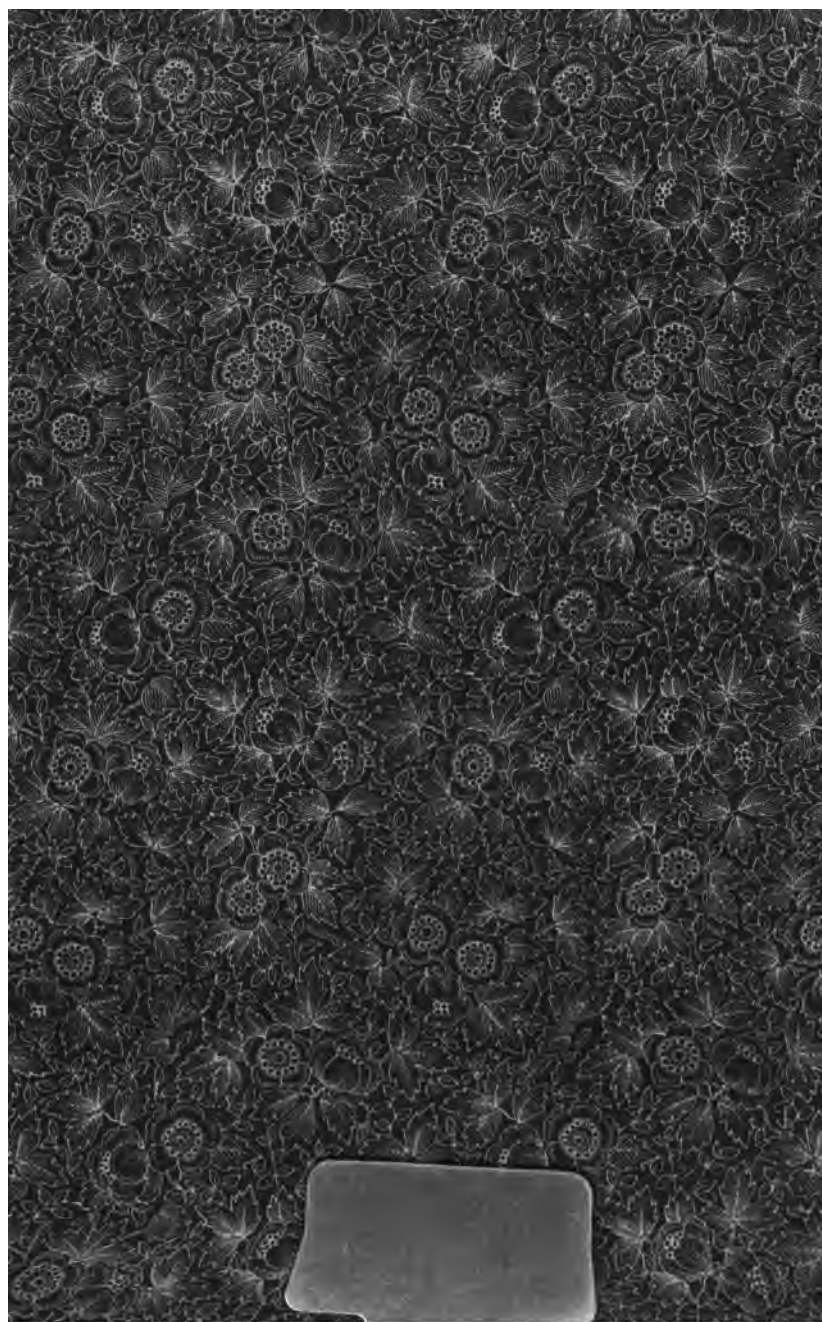
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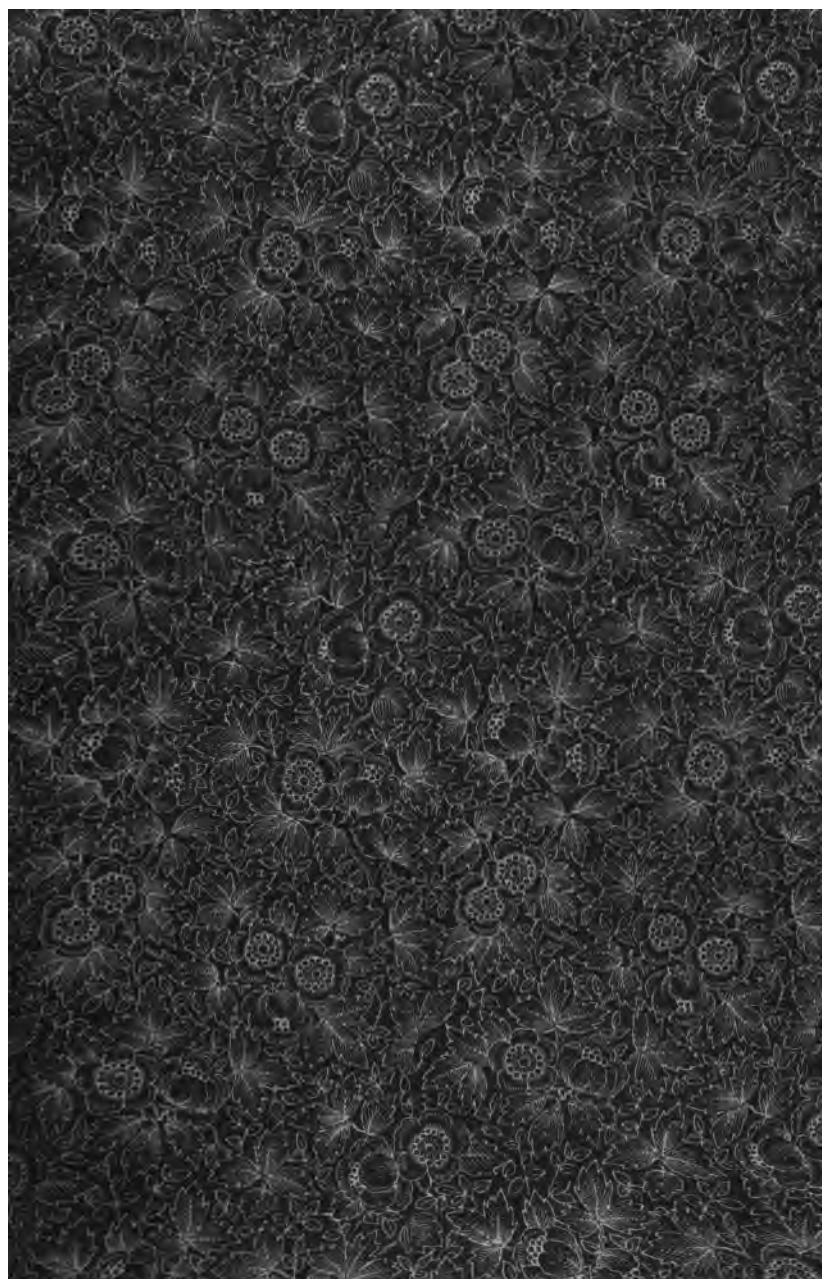
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THE PRIEST'S BLESSING



BY THE REV. F. J. C. M.







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BY THE SAME AUTHOR,
In 1 Vol., Price 2s.,
 AT ALL BOOKSELLERS,
THE QUEEN OF CONNAUGHT.

SOME OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

'Since Lever and Carleton passed away, we have had little of Irish life in fiction, and that little has lacked character and power. This new writer gives promise of filling the vacant place. . . . This novel contains an unusual mixture of plot and sensation, faithful character, study, and powerful description. A book to be welcomed and read with delight in these times for its freshness of conception, its racy, rattling humour, and its ridiculousness—sometimes so oddly dashed with deep thought—all of which combine to attest an exceptional power on the part of the author.'—*British Quarterly Review*.

'Extremely singular, and quite unlike any other tale that has ever appeared; and it has about it a strange fascination. In reading it, one seems to be transported into some strange land of poetry and romance. . . . Indeed, "The Queen of Connaught" is a series of very skillfully executed pictures, which present a wonderful appearance of reality. Poor Kathleen finds out when dying how mistaken her life has been, and she does not desire to begin it again. She dies in the arms of the faithful husband whom till lately she had never understood, and whose goodness she has never doubted, but whose love has followed her to the end, and will long survive her. A most touching story indeed, full of pathos and full of humour, is this "Queen of Connaught."—*Morning Post*.

'A story that combines considerable inventiveness and plot power with racy study of character and fresh picturesque description. . . . Our readers will not fail to be struck by the intimate knowledge of Irish ways and customs, the subtle instinct for the finer distinguishing traits in Irish character; and they will no doubt appreciate also the sense at once of the humour of Irish life, and of the delicacy, the sentiment, and the rough defiance and dare-devilry that are so oddly intermingled in it. . . . Dramatic force is noticeable throughout, no less than true descriptive knack. . . . Alike to those who seek striking incident and picture, and those who seek more solid teaching, "The Queen of Connaught" may be very safely recommended.'—*Nonconformist*.

'A very new subject is treated in this story with great freshness and vivacity. The tale may be said to be a study of the Irish character and temperament; impartial and thoughtful in its intention, and cleverly executed, though the author's contempt for the class of characters chiefly described is visible enough. . . . Nothing can be happier or more graphic than the author's description of the kind of society which frequents O'Mara Castle as soon as Kathleen restores the glories of its ancient hospitality. The humours of the society that flock there, from Timothy Linney, the stately old man who displaces the master of his house from his own chair because he has taken a fancy to it, to Biddy Cranby, the poor crazy woman who starves herself, in both senses of the word, to feed and clothe her children, are painted with a picturesque breadth and loveliness that adds sensibly to one's knowledge of human nature itself. . . . It is a most charming study of a subject full of colour, light and shadow, and one that rises steadily in interest up to the close. The third volume is decidedly the best of the three, and the scene which comes most nearly up to the ideal point in power, is the critical scene of the book, where Kathleen, drenched by the storm, and alone, faces the conspirators against her husband's life, in the dreary solitude of their mountain hiding-place. . . . Situations of less intensity are often painted with consummate skill. . . . All are etched with a most faithful and skilful hand. . . . This tale is full of life, skill, and insight.'—*Spectator*.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR,
Uniform with "The Queen of Connaught,"
THE DARK COLLEEN.

SOME OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

'The author of "The Queen of Connaught" has again given to the world an interesting and romantic tale. . . . Very original is the charm of the early days of poor Morna's romance, the rugged grandeur of her home, the picturesque habits and primitive ceremonies, the tenderness and ferocity of her melancholy Celtic kindred.'—*Athenæum*.

'Lively and spirited, abounding with fresh conceptions and picturesque situations. No more striking locale could have been chosen than Eagle Island—a semi-savage islet on the west coast of Ireland, with its primitive manners and customs, and its strange race of half-Celtic, half-Spanish inhabitants.'—*Globe*.

'The originality of the story is complete. Its charm lies in the picture of a free and unfamiliar life. . . . Poor Morna's return to Eagle Island, tired, forsaken, and heartily sick of the unknown world that had seemed so charming, makes a touching scene. . . . Certain states of emotion—as, for example, the sorrow of Morna, and her bewilderment when she finds that Bessom has ceased to love her; certain aspects of nature in seas and mountains—are very delicately and carefully rendered. The mixed character of Louander, the mate, with his love, which would fain be honourable, awakening a certain gentleness in a hardened disposition, is also a clever study.'—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

'Unquestionably a book of mark. . . . In her word-pictures and still-life scenes the author is all that could be desired. . . . Morna is a very fascinating conception, and drawn with great truth and tenderness of feeling.'—*Graphic*.

'We have scarcely a fault to find. . . . It may and should be read. . . . Morna's savage purity, and, at the same time, her depths of passion, are most admirably drawn. The book is an excellent piece of work.'—*Academy*.

'This fresh and unconventional romance, whose charm is in its vivid delineations of the weird inhabitants of Eagle Island, and of the varying aspects of this lone spot in the ocean, according to whether the Atlantic peacefully laps its shores or dashes with the fury of the tempest on its rocks.'—*Illustrated London News*.

'We may possibly find in its author a worthy successor, though in a somewhat different line, to those great bygone delineators of Irish life and character whose names have become household words. . . . Considered merely as a telling story, "The Dark Colleen" is admirable. The pictures of the simple peasant life upon Eagle Island, with its alternate toil and merry-making, its dangers and its pleasures, give a delightful impression of the inhabitants of the solitary spot. . . . These the author has portrayed in a manner which is obviously the result of knowledge and actual observation, and is worthy of all praise.'—*Morning Post*.

'A novel which possesses the rare and valuable quality of novelty . . . the scenery will be strange to most readers, and in many passages the aspects of Nature are very cleverly described. Moreover, the book is a study of a very curious and interesting state of society. . . . The life is that of people as unsophisticated and as much their own rulers as the dwellers in the woodland villages in George Sand's "Maitres Sonneurs." . . . A novel which no novel reader should miss, and which people who generally shun novels may go out of their way to enjoy.'—*Saturday Review*.

THE PRIEST'S BLESSING:

OR,

*POOR PATRICK'S PROGRESS FROM
THIS WORLD TO A BETTER.*

BY

HARRIETT JAY,

AUTHORESS OF 'THE QUEEN OF CONNAUGHT,' 'THE DARK COLLEEN,'
'MADGE DUNRAVEN,' ETC., ETC.



LONDON:

F. V. WHITE & CO.

(SUCCESSORS TO SAMUEL TINSLEY & Co.),

31 SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1881.

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251. i. 452.

COLSTON AND SON, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH.



DEDICATION.

To the Right Hon. W. E. Forster,
CHIEF SECRETARY OF IRELAND.

RIGHT HON. SIR,

Will you permit me to grace with your name a work which is, or professes to be, a kind of study of the Irish peasant's life from the cradle to the grave?

Many years ago, in the time of the Irish famine, an English gentleman wandered through the famishing districts of Ireland, giving help to the needy, comforting the sorrowful, on a benign errand of mercy. Since that time that gentleman's name has, in many an Irish home, been the synonym of English philanthropy. When, a little time ago, the same individual, known to all the world as a noble-minded politician, became Her Majesty's Chief Secretary for the sister country, many Irishmen who loved and remembered him said to themselves, 'Justice will be done now, for Forster loves Ireland.'

There may be points in this book with which you disagree, expressions which you would wish changed; but I inscribe it to you because you have the welfare of the Irish people at heart, and because I, with many others, sympathise with you, and despise your tormentors,—knowing, as I do, that there is among all the so-called friends of Ireland, who have made their unhappy country a byword for folly, mendacity, and indiscriminate free fighting, not one who has a tithe of your philanthropy, your experience, or your wisdom. Accept, therefore, this little study of the Irish question from one who, like yourself, loves Ireland and the Irish peasant, but would warn both against false prophets and teachers, nationalists and time-serving misleaders. And believe me, with all sympathy, respect, and admiration,

Your obedient Servant,

THE AUTHORESS OF
'The Queen of Connaught.'

LONDON, *July* 15, 1881.



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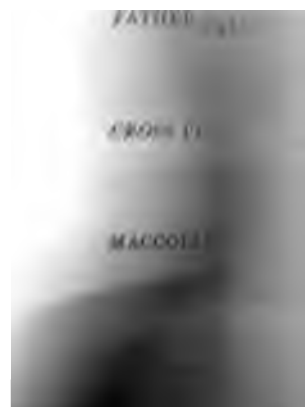
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MARK here, while foolish factions rage
Poor Patrick's piteous pilgrimage !
Mark how the dews of heaven are shed
By holy hands upon his head
At setting forth ; then day by day
Follow him forth upon his way,
Where no flower blooms, where no bird sings,
Where the great Cross of Sorrow flings
Its jet-black shadow on his face !

Last, mark, while darkness comes apace,
The journey's end, where on his track
The Gallows rises gaunt and black ;
While now again the dews are shed
By holy hands upon his head,
The great bell rings, he goes to die
With white face lifted to the sky.

Follow a space from page to page
The Martyr on his pilgrimage !



THE PRIEST'S BLESSING.

PROLOGUE.

WHAT name is this child to have?' asked the Priest, taking up a jugful of holy water from the tub * which stood beside him, and holding it over the pink face of the unconscious infant in his arms.

'Pat, yer riv'rence,' replied a woman, one of a ragged group which stood on.

* In some of the remote districts of Ireland a common washing-tub is often used as a receptacle for holy water.

the other side of the altar-rails facing the Priest.

‘Patrick,’ began the Priest, when he was interrupted.

‘No, no! Pat, yer riv’rence. He was born on the holy Saint’s day, God bless him!’

‘Well, well, Pat and Patrick are one and the same,’ returned the Priest; then he continued solemnly, ‘Patrick O’Connor, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.’

‘Screech now!’ whispered the woman, under her breath, and all ears were pricked eagerly to hear if the child gave what superstition deemed the sure sign of longevity—a lusty roar. The water being poured upon the infant produced from that small piece of humanity a feeble cry; the little clenched hands were thrust out as if to

beat off the Priest's blessing, and the small legs kicked convulsively. Then the Priest, handing the child back across the altar-rails, let his brown hands linger upon its head in a last benediction. So little Patrick was received back into the ragged arms which were waiting for him, and conveyed out of the chapel.

When the party had gone, the Priest, removing his elaborately embroidered scarf, his long gown and velvet head-dress, donned his plain priestly garb, and hastily quitting the chapel, wended his way to the neighbouring house, a whitewashed edifice of stone, thatched with straw.

Meantime, the christening party, passing slowly across the hills, reached and entered a dark, dilapidated mud cabin, which lay concealed on the black bog. A bright turf fire burnt in the middle of the floor,

and around it crouched some eight or ten ragged children of both sexes, while on a bundle of straw which was strewn in the corner lay a wasted, sickly woman. As the party entered, bearing the child, the ragged forms about the floor scrambled to their feet, and the woman half rose from the straw, all eager to see the infant who had so lately received the priceless gift of the Priest's blessing.

During that evening this house was the liveliest one in Patrickstown. The boys brought in their tin fifes and played, the old men and women nodded and smiled, and the ragged children danced for very joy, because there was come amongst them another mouth to eat up the potatoes which had been so woefully scarce before. Late in the evening the Priest looked in, and, gazing again upon the sleeping child, drank

its health in a glass of home-brewed potheen, remarking that he was glad to welcome another lamb into his fold, and promising, to the delight of all, to watch over its path through life.





CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES A PROPHET OF EVIL.

ABOUT thirty years after the occurrence of the events chronicled in our prologue, three passengers were seated in a first-class compartment of the train which was running from Dublin to Ballyferry.

The first, a tall elderly gentleman, with somewhat stern aquiline features and iron-grey hair, was reading the day's paper. Opposite to him a young lady sat, with half-closed eyes, languidly reclining upon the cushions of the carriage. The third pas-

senger was a fat, fluffy, red-faced gentleman, who was evidently going a good part of the whole journey, and was making his preparations accordingly. Leaving his shining chimney-pot in the hat-cords on the roof of the carriage, he replaced it by a grey cloth cap, and his tight frock-coat was, at the same time, exchanged for a loose and certainly less elegant jacket. When these preparations were made, he dragged from under the opposite seat a black tin box labelled 'Deeds,' opened it, and dived elbow-deep into a chaos of parchment manuscripts and letters.

For some time the train ran smoothly on and the passengers remained silent and absorbed in their several occupations. Presently, however, it stopped with a violent jerk. Looking up from his deeds, the red-faced gentleman glared fiercely at the elderly gentleman, and the elderly gentleman, drop-

ping his paper, glanced quietly at the red-faced gentleman. The young lady, languidly opening her eyes, looked carelessly from one to the other.

‘Do you know what is the matter?’ asked the elderly gentleman, as if his words were drawn forcibly from him by his companion’s fixed and awful stare.

‘’Tis the engine that’s run short o’ wather, I suppose, or coal,’ replied the red-faced gentleman, in a strong Irish brogue. ‘The divils, bad luck to them, they don’t know how to manage the line, and never will till there’s competition.’

At that moment the train moved on again, and the red-faced gentleman, after taking note of both his companions, returned in silence to the perusal of his deeds. One, two, three, four small stations were passed; at last the fifth platform appeared, and with

it was heard the cry of 'All tickets ready,' while the clang of iron resounded on the carriage wheels. The red-faced gentleman closed his box with a snap, produced his ticket from his waistcoat pocket, pushed back his cap, rubbed his face, and yawned. He was evidently a well-known character on the line, for as the guard opened the door and nipped the tickets, he touched his cap, and said,—

'Good morning, Mr O'Flaherty, sor; glad to see ye back, sor.'

Mr O'Flaherty nodded his head, making his fat red cheeks shake like jelly.

'Morning, Barney,' he replied, adding, 'any word yet of Mr Murphy's affair?'

'Not a word, yer honour. Och, faith, they'll nivir find *thim* out intirly!'

'Bedad, I think you're right, Barney!'

replied Mr O'Flaherty, with a wink and

a grin; 'and it's thimselves that was wrong in the first place for not putting the case into competent hands. Why the divil couldn't they come to O'Flaherty and Skinem? But I heard that the police had some kind o' a suspicion.'

'And that's true for you, sor; but divil a foot 'll they get beyond that same; for, after all, what can they prove at all? Sorra a word. It's a stritch o' fine weather this we're having, Mr O'Flaherty, sor. Good morning, sor.'

The door was banged to, the guard disappeared, and in three minutes more the train was steaming on again.

'Sad affair, sor,' said Mr O'Flaherty, regarding his fellow-traveller with his habitual stare.

'Indeed,' replied the other. 'Some police case?'

Mr O'Flaherty wagged his head in a knowing manner, and sunk his voice to a husky whisper.

'Murder!' he replied, mysteriously. 'Bloody murder, sor, and the natest case—I mane,'—suddenly correcting himself, and assuming a graver air—'the saddest case that we've had in this country for years.'

'Dear me!'

'Is it possible that you have heard nothing about it?'

'Not a word!'

'Humph! 'twas in the papers, I believe; though in troth they make little o' such things in print, the rogues. A gintleman shot in broad daylight, within two hundred yards of his own door, sor!'

'Indeed,' replied the other, growing rapidly interested. 'How long ago did that happen?'

'Just three weeks ago to-day.'

The elderly gentleman started.

'And in what part of Ireland did the murder occur?' he asked.

'*Here*, sor, close to the very station that were are approaching. I'll show ye the very spot where he fell!'

At that moment the train drew up at another platform, and the carriage in which the party were seated stopped exactly between a pair of white gates, which were closed in order to stop, during the passing of the train, the traffic on the highway. Pressing his fat face close to the carriage window, Mr O'Flaherty pointed with his fore-finger.

'There you are, sor!' he exclaimed, with an evident sense of enjoyment; 'twas on that very spot, midway in the avenue, that he fell, poor divil!'

His gaze, travelling past the white gates, rested upon an avenue of tall lime trees, which ran from thence and communicated with a stone-built mansion-house lying some four hundred yards from the station itself. It was a bright sunshiny day: birds fluttered in the heavy-foliaged trees, and insects swarmed in the air; on hill and valley, land and sea, the sunrays sparkled gloriously; but midway in the avenue an ominous shadow lay as if to mark the spot. The elderly gentleman shuddered as he looked, and the young lady's blooming cheeks turned pale.

'And so the crime was actually committed there, and in broad daylight?' asked the elderly gentleman, as the train moved on again.

'In troth it was thin. He was just taking a stroll and smoking his cigar after lunch, when his wife, who was looking from the

window, saw him fall. She thought, the crature, 'twas in a fit he was, but when she ran to him she just found him as dead as a tinpenny nail. The bullet had entered the temple and lodged in the cerebrum !'

'And did no one hear the shot?'

'Of coorse they heard it, but divil a word will they tell about it. They're a clannish people, the Roman Catholic Irish, sor, and they stand by one another till death !'

'Had the gentleman been a resident here long?'

'Not at all ; he'd only just come into the property, and he'd run down to have a little sport. You see, sor,' he continued, after a slight pause, 'the Irish people are an independent race, and strong in their own convictions. They've a natural antipathy to interlopers, they abominate Protistants,

and they are not slow at resenting what they consider a wrong !’

‘And what, pray, had this unfortunate gentleman done that he should be murdered ? Was he a tyrannical landlord ?’

‘Divil the bit. He was a friend of my own, sor, a rale good-hearted fellow, as all his tinants tistified at the trial ; but’ (here Mr O’Flaherty sank his voice ominously) *‘he raised the price of turf in the neighbouring town !’*

‘And he was actually shot for *that* ?’ asked the other, aghast.

‘Faith, he was thin. ’Tis little ye know of the Irish peasantry, sor, if you think that interference of that kind will be tolerated at all. Is it an Englishman you are yourself, sor ?’

‘No ; I am an Irishman, but I have not lived in the country for years. I presume,’

he added, resuming the thread of the discourse, 'or rather, I gather from what you say, that in Ireland a man must not do as he pleases with his own?'

'In troth he can thin—if it plaíses his tinants and the Priest!'

'The Priest! What has he do with it?'

'Nothing and everything,' returned Mr O'Flaherty. 'In a word, sor, he is the spring working the whole machine. But now,' he continued, in a brisker tone, 'I'll just point out to ye the spot where the station-master fell the other day.'

'Another murder?'

'Yes, in troth; and, between ourselves, I've a strong suspicion who did the deed, but divil a proof can I get, or by the bones o' my ancestors I'd saize him. Now, thin, we're coming to the very place where he tumbled over!'

The train entered another solitary station.

‘There it is!’ cried Mr O’Flaherty, excitedly; ‘he was standing on that very spot there on the platform only five days ago, and he was shot through the heart wid slugs, and fell dead as a duck—good luck to him!’

‘God bless me! And what had *he* done?’

‘Jist discharged a poor divil o’ a porter for neglecting his duty. The poor boy was an O’Connor, and the O’Connors are strong hereabouts.’

Here the elderly gentleman turned to the young lady, who had listened to this catalogue of horrors with pale cheeks and eyes dilated with fear.

‘Well, Kate,’ he said, smiling darkly, ‘what do you think of all this?’

‘I am frightened to death, papa,’ said the

girl quickly. 'Don't you think it would be better for us to turn and go home?'

'What, turn back half way? I thought you were stout-hearted, Kate?'

'But suppose they were to shoot *you*, papa?'

'I don't suppose they will. At any rate, we must make the best of it now; it would never do to run away from the mere shadow of danger.'

Mr O'Flaherty had listened eagerly to these asides; when they were over he put in his word again.

'May I ask, Mr— Mr—' he began.

'O'Brien,' said the other.

'May I ask, Mr O'Brien, if you are an Irish landowner, sor?'

I am,' returned the other, quietly. 'My daughter and I are going down to reside for a time on an estate which I have recently purchased in a village called Patrickstown.'

‘ Ah, I’ve never been in that part of the country myself, but I’ve heard they’re a wild lot there. They proclaimed the districts in that neighbourhood some years ago on account of some daring outrages, I believe. But the proclamations are of little use, to be sure, for when once the people get the notion of sending a man to glory, they give little care as to the manner in which it is done!’

At this point of the conversation Mr O’Flaherty, who had assumed his stiffer but more respectable attire, suddenly sprang open his black bag, and, after fumbling for a few minutes amongst the chaos of deeds, produced a card, which he handed to his companion. On this card was printed —

O’Flaherty and Skinem,

Law Agents,

Blarneytown.

'I may say, sor,' he added, 'that O'Flaherty and Skinem are *the* men for agrarian outrages in this part of the country. I hung three men at the last assizes, sor, whin divil another man in the town would have dared to touch a hair of their heads; and, by the same token, it was I got off Barney O'Shea at the same sessions, though divil a soul was it that shot that agent but Barney himself. I *know* he did it, sor; but he came to O'Flaherty and Skinem, and, bedad, he's walking a free man to-day! If ever *you* should require my assistance, Mr O'Brien, sor, it's *there* I'm to be found.'

'Thank you,' returned Mr O'Brien; 'but under the circumstances I shall not be very sorry if I never require your services.'

'Bedad, thin, that's good for *you*,' replied Mr O'Flaherty, with a grin; 'but if ye mane to live in Patrickstown ye'll be glad enough

of some assistance sooner or later, b'lieve me! Good day, sor; good day, ma'am; pleasant journey.' So saying, Mr O'Flaherty slipped quietly from the carriage and disappeared.

'Oh, I'm so glad that man is gone,' said the young lady, creeping nearer to her father's side. 'Do you really mean to go on, papa?'

'Of course I do, Kate. There, don't be down-hearted. It's my opinion that Patrickstown is not so black as it is painted!'





CHAPTER II.

POOR PATRICK'S JOURNEY BEGINS.

WHEN Mr O'Brien arrived with his daughter in Patrickstown, and assumed his position as a large landed proprietor in the place, Patrick O'Connor, whose first small adventure in life was described in our prologue, had reached the age of manhood. Nay, more, there was a little Patrick, not to speak of half-a-dozen other olive branches, who were going through the same experiences which had attended their father before them. How often are children exhorted,

to walk in the footsteps of their progenitors ! and yet, I fear, if the innocent offspring followed religiously in the father's plodding road, its path through life would by no means be one of roses !

After that first blessing which he had received from the Priest, the gifts of God had rarely come Patrick's way. True, the Priest, God bless him, had always taken a kindly interest in his welfare ; and when that holy man had passed away and another had come down to fill his place, the spiritual portion of poor Patrick had been attended to more assiduously still. He had confessed his sins with clockwork punctuality, and he had received absolution ; better still, he could always rely upon the Father's advice whenever the tangled skein of his life could not be made to run smooth. So far then as spiritual welfare went,

Patrick had no just cause of complaint.

But, alas! it was his mission to discover that to trust in Providence overmuch was not the way to bring fire to his hearth or food to his lips. There was a corporeal portion to his life as well as a spiritual, and the former was so much the more troublesome of the two! He had been the youngest of a long family, and he had had to work his way in life, as his mother and father and brothers and sisters had done before him. At an early age he had been set to herding cattle, and afterwards, as he grew older, and the offspring of his elder brothers was able to take his place at the herding, he had been put to tilling the bit of land. His parents might have been willing—had the means been within their reach—to give him a bit of schooling ;

but no opportunity was afforded them. There was a skeleton of a small roofless building standing not far from the village on the roadside. This building had been erected a few years before Patrick was born, by a gentleman who formerly possessed the acres which had now passed into Mr O'Brien's hands, a gentleman of philanthropic principles, who had been earnest in his desire to promote the educational advancement of the benighted creatures about him. But ere the building could be completed, the priest, with the good of his people always at heart, had thought it incumbent upon him to interfere. A passage of arms ensued which ended in the complete triumph of the Church over the Laity, and the consequent suppression of all educational gains. From that day forth the building had remained a sort of ruin on the bog—

affording shelter for little herd boys and nothing more.

Thus it was that when poor Patrick arrived at manhood his brain was no whit more enlightened than were those of his cattle—or fellow-men. He could neither write nor read, the simplest truths of knowledge were unknown to him; and of the world in which he dwelt he knew only two geographical facts—the stretch of black bog around him and the sky above his head. But then he had always the Priest to tell him all that it was well for him to know; ah, yes, he had the good Soggarth Aroon, praised so much in verse and prose, who loved his people as if they were his kin, and guided them gently up the stony path to God.

Patrick O'Connor knew nothing of the other advantages which might have come

his way, therefore he did not mourn them. He believed himself to be nearly as well off as his fellow-creatures, and he was content. He was by no means an enlightened mortal, but he had within his soul a few natural gleams of truth and conscience, which kept him straight. He had no ambition—it was a word unknown to him ; but he was diligent in the cultivation of his bit of land, because he knew that if the potatoes were not well grown starvation would be the certain result. He diligently confessed his sins (to his credit be it spoken they were few and far between), because the Priest assured him that if he failed to do this his miserable body would be consigned to eternal flames. He gave his sole thoughts to the dreary ways and means of life ; the salvation and guidance of his soul he left entirely in the hands of his teacher and master.

When poor Patrick attained his majority, his prospects in life were far from encouraging. The soil attached to the wretched hovel where he had been born had been divided and sub-divided until there were considerably more mouths to fill than potatoes to fill them, and had Patrick married and clamorously demanded his own small share, in a very short time the graveyard would undoubtedly have been the richer for the deed. But although he was as dull-witted a mortal as could be found in a summer's day, he had quite enough common sense to know that where he himself was starved and pinched, there was certainly no room for a wife and the offspring which were sure to follow. So he adopted the custom of his countrymen; made inquiries about the place for a marriageable girl, with a fortune which

embraced a house, a patch of land, and several cows. Having after a time secured his prize, he again sought the assistance of the Priest ; and in the very chapel where he had received the first blessing, he stood bare-headed, and under the second blessing of the Church his life began anew.

Years passed on in quick succession, and each year grew darker for poor Patrick. The patter of childish feet and the din of childish voices filled his dwelling, and each infant in its turn clamoured vigorously for food, until Patrick himself was obliged to abandon a goodly portion of his meals in order that these gifts of God which rained so freely upon him might be fed. At last the flow of blessings suddenly ceased. His worn-out wife was carried to her last home on the bleak hillside, leaving to Patrick's tender care the half-dozen mortals which she had

so indefatigably laboured to present to him. Had things gone as well subsequently to this event as they had done before, poor Patrick's life would have been at least as easy as that of most of his neighbours.

This was not ordained. The bit of land which, when it had first come into Patrick's possession had not been over-rich and productive, had since been degenerating year by year, and although Patrick worked at it pertinaciously, endeavouring to squeeze as much nutriment out of it as possible, he found that the produce was only sufficient to keep his family from absolute starvation. So he looked gloomily at the little pig which he had intended to fatten up to pay his rent, and two days later he drove it to the market and returned to his delighted family with a bag of meal. Thus was starvation warded off for one season at least. For the next

year Patrick did what the Priest told him—trusted in the goodness of God.

When the summer had come and nearly gone, and the first bag of meal and a second that followed had long been empty, Patrick opened a ridge of potatoes and found them black and scarcely fit for food. The ground was drained dry and had not sufficient nutriment to grow them ; the fruits were small as marbles, and there were very few attached to the vines at all. Patrick looked grave ; but he was not pushed into a corner yet, so, wise man as he was, he put off thinking about the future till another time.

His family were healthy and hearty, and before their voracious appetites even the black potatoes rapidly disappeared. It was not, however, until the last ridge was opened that Patrick began to consider what he must

do. How would his little ones be able to pass through the long winter months with gnawing stomachs and fainting hearts? The pig was gone, but he had still one cow left—only one, which kept them scantily supplied with milk—and prevented the bare diet of potatoes from undermining their constitutions.

By this time he owed two years' rent, and as the property was about to change hands, the proprietor had sent in a summons for his money. So what could poor Patrick do but drive his cow to the fair, pay his rent with a part of the purchase money, buy another bag of meal, and bring home a pound or two for other contingencies? Thus the family were saved again, although they now had only half-a-dozen hens and a few chickens.

They were by no means a thrifty family; they had never been taught economy, and

they did not practise it ; while the meal bag stood in the house they dived liberally into it ; while the money lasted they supplied themselves liberally with tea and milk ; consequently before the summer was over they were standing on the verge of abject poverty again, and often indeed went hungry to bed.

It was with a sinking heart that Patrick went this year to dig up his first dinner of potatoes. He did not argue within his unenlightened mind that the soil which had been bad enough last year, must necessarily be poorer this ; he only knew that during the summer a blight had passed over the land, and that most of his potato vines were blackened from its breath. The shaking of the first bine consummated his fear ; about half-a-dozen 'marbles' were scattered on the earth, and part of these were blighted and rendered absolutely unfit for food. Patrick

seized up one in a tremor and rubbed off the skin with his thumb : there was no mistaking those great black spots which disfigured the fruit like a leprosy. The potatoes were blighted. Looking upon that fact face to face was to him like looking upon slowly approaching doom. To think of what must be done this year was useless, for what *could* be done ? Now that the pig and cow were gone there was nothing left to sell ; and as another year had passed over his head there was more rent owing. The last meal bag had been emptied and cast aside several days before, so that in the potatoes now lying rotting in the ground lay his sole means of subsistence.

It was while the family were collected around the sieve which held their first nauseous meal of blighted potatoes that Patrick sat apart, pondering upon the pro-

blem of the future. He began to wonder now what he should do during the long weary winter months, and the summer succeeding them, if those many mouths around him should clamour for food which he could not give. He had never in his life been obliged to skim starvation so narrowly as it seemed he would have to do now.

While he was sitting and meditating thus, a pretty head was thrust in at the door of his cabin, and a moment later Kate O'Brien stepped across the threshold to get shelter from a lightly falling shower. As Kate entered Patrick rose, and, giving her welcome, offered her his seat, which she took, gazing meanwhile at the pale-faced urchins who were busily disposing of the few waxy potatoes, and then at the gaunt, sad-looking man who stood close by.

'Are those all your own children?' she asked kindly.

'They are, miss,' returned Patrick.

'What makes them look so pale and thin?' continued Kate.

Patrick shook his head. He had never noticed before that they were pale and thin; he took up the new problem now, and began to consider upon it. By slow degrees, and by a process of minute cross-examination, Kate managed to worm out of him the truth—that his pig and cow were gone to keep the wolf from the door, and that now he was about the poorest man in Patrickstown, having only a few hens and a blighted crop of potatoes to feed his hungry brood. So when the girl went away, she told Patrick that she would speak to her father about him, and that if he presented himself at the house in

the morning, he would certainly obtain assistance.

When she was gone, Patrick sat by his fire and smoked his pipe, contented and hopeful for one night at least.





CHAPTER III.

THE PARISH PRIEST.

WHEN Kate O'Brien reached her home, she found that a stranger had called during her absence, none other indeed than the Parish Priest of Patrickstown, who was at that moment talking with her father in the drawing-room. So she hastily changed her damp clothes and hurried down to give their visitor a welcome. When she entered the room Father Malloy was standing on the hearthrug, with his hands clasped behind his back. He was a tall man, with a powerful

frame and remarkably handsome face. Although he had originally sprung from the peasantry, he had about him all the signs of gentle breeding; he was ever anxious to please, and consequently he was almost always liked.

When Mr O'Brien introduced his daughter, Kate bowed, but Father Malloy came forward and took the girl's hand in such a kindly manner, that her heart went out to him at once.

'And how do you like Patrickstown, Miss O'Brien?' he asked, placing a chair for her and seating himself close by her side. As he was a man considerably past fifty, and as his hair was rapidly turning from black to grey, he permitted himself to assume a sort of friendly, fatherly kind of speech, which put the girl at once at her ease.

‘I should like it immensely,’ returned Kate, ‘if our tenants were not quite so wretchedly poor.’

‘My dear young lady, if you allow unusual care for your inferiors to mar the pleasures of your life, I fear your happy moments will be few indeed. Unfortunately the gifts of God are not equalised in this world ; go where you will, wretchedness of some kind meets you, and poverty is not always its worst form.’

‘But when we see such misery about us, I think it is our duty to relieve it,’ said Kate.

‘Of course,’ returned the Priest, ‘though few young ladies, I fear, would take the trouble to think about it at all.’

‘It seems to me,’ said Mr O’Brien, who had been silent for some minutes, ‘that very little work is required here to regenerate the place altogether.’

‘ You mean to go in for improvements ? ’
asked the Priest.

‘ Well, not exactly in the sense that you mean, though my agent assures me that the only possible way to make the estate worth anything, is by evicting half the tenants ; but I hardly like to do that, for I know that the poor creatures have a sort of passion for the soil.’

The Priest shrugged his shoulders.

‘ I fear you would find evictions dangerous work,’ he said.

Mr O’Brien set his teeth.

‘ Fear would not deter me,’ he said ; ‘ however, I have at present no idea of evicting the tenants,—that process, though it is supposed to benefit the tenant, in reality enriches the proprietor. I want to benefit the people, and I think I have formed a very good plan.’

‘Indeed, and if I am not trespassing too much upon your confidence, may I ask what your plans are?’

‘Certainly. I want to lift the people out of their state of *moral* wretchedness, to elevate their minds, and make them work their brains, in fact, to convert them into men and women, not leave them in a state of bovine ignorance as they are at present. Now, as I believe that the state of the body is, to a certain extent, an index to the state of the mind, I mean to begin by pulling down some of these wretched dwellings and improving others.’

‘My dear sir,’ said the Priest, ‘I cannot sufficiently applaud your sentiments—they are philanthropic, kindly and generous, but you will excuse me if I say that I fear your plans would never answer here. The people are very poor, I know, and

wofully ignorant, still they are happy, and they would actually resent any undue interference, however generously it was meant!’

‘They seem to me to be a very kind-hearted race of people. I fancy with a little management I could bring them round to my views.’

‘If I were your natural enemy,’ said the Priest, ‘I should advise you to try the process. I have been intimately acquainted with these people for thirty years—you for one week—and I am sure you will allow that my knowledge of them should be the most correct, and I assure you, Mr O’Brien, that a more difficult set of people to manage never lived on this earth. They are easy and good-natured enough when you do not cross them, but oppose their wishes in any way and their true nature comes to light.

They like to jog along in the old way, to live and die on the old acres, and leave them to their children after them. Let any man come and interfere with their mode of life and they look upon him in the light of a natural enemy at once, and treat him as such.'

'Perhaps, papa,' said Kate, who was growing rather pale, 'if you gave one or two of the poorest a little assistance it would do without interfering with all. I should be sorry not to assist some. I ran into a hut while the shower was on, and my heart bled for the poor family; they are the very poorest in the village, I think, for there are six children, and they have only a few hens and a small patch of potatoes to keep them the whole year. The poor man is coming up to-morrow, and you must see him.'

'Good girl, Kate,' said Mr O'Brien,

pinching her cheek ; ' I'll warrant I shall be popular enough if you go amongst the tenantry ;' then turning to the Priest, he added, ' I am afraid I am rather per-tenacious in this matter. You will excuse me if I still persist in wishing to try my own plan.'

' My dear sir, don't mention it, pray,' said the Priest, laughing ; " convince a man against his will," you know ; after all I have no right to dictate your actions, but I thought a little of my experience might be useful to you.'

' I am thankful for your advice.'

' Don't mention it. If we couldn't give that to one another it would be but a poor look out. Well, I hope we shall not remain strangers, sir,' he added, buttoning up his coat.

' I hope so too,' said Mr O'Brien ; ' when-

ever you are passing here I shall be delighted if you will look in.'

'Thanks; and I trust you will remember that my house is not far off. In places like this we dispense with the ceremonies of town, for if people are not sociable a country life is wretched. I am afraid you will find it very dull, Miss O'Brien,' he added, turning to Kate; 'but you must come over and see some of the marriages in my chapel, and go out to a dance occasionally. It would please the people and amuse you.'

'Thank you,' said Kate, smiling into the kindly face before her, and with a hearty good-night, and a warm shake of the hand to both father and daughter, the Priest departed.

'Isn't he nice, papa?' said Kate, when the sound of his retreating steps had died away.

‘ Yes, Kate, he’s a very jolly fellow. I like him.’

‘ Haven’t the Irish priests great influence with the people ?’

‘ I believe so, dear. Why ?’

‘ Father Malloy must have great power here ?’

‘ Of course he has !’

The girl sighed relieved.

‘ I am not nearly so much afraid for you now,’ she said ; ‘ I don’t believe Father Malloy would let us come to any harm.’

‘ I don’t think he would, Kate, if he could help it, but really you must not be always foreseeing danger, or you’ll not be fitted for an Irish life.’

Meanwhile the Priest, walking on his homeward way, was mentally surveying the scene which had taken place. Whether or not he liked his new acquaintance he hardly

knew. His subsequent conduct would decide the nature of Father Malloy's feelings for him. Of one thing he felt certain, that if the man attempted to carry out his views with regard to the people the result would be a hard fight. Father Malloy had held unlimited sway in Patrickstown for thirty years, and he had not the remotest intention of dividing his sovereignty with another. At this point of his meditations he found himself before the door of Patrick O'Connor's hut, so he entered in.

The room was dark, for the evening was well advanced, but a dull glowing light, proceeding from a piece of smouldering bog fir, illuminated a small space on the floor. The family were in bed, but Patrick himself sat on his form beside the fire.

‘Well, Patrick, and how are you getting on?’ asked the holy man, taking his seat beside him.

‘Caed fealta, yer riv’rence,’ returned Patrick, rising at once.

‘Sit down, sit down,’ said the Priest kindly; ‘and so you’ve had a visit from your new mistress, have you?’

‘I have, yer riv’rence.’

‘And I have just come from Cragduff House, too.’

‘Have ye indeed, sor; and what did yer riv’rence think about the master?’

The Priest shrugged his shoulders.

‘I don’t know him well enough to say much about him yet, Patrick. It’s a pity he’s a Sassenach,’ he added. ‘Protestants have no right to own Irish acres. I hope he’ll prove a good master to you, that’s all. Good-night, Patrick.’

After his visitor was gone, Patrick, re-seating himself upon the form, began to wonder for the first time whether Mr O'Brien was likely to prove an enemy or a friend.





CHAPTER IV.

KINDRED SPIRITS.

WHILE Mr O'Brien was engaged in explaining his philanthropic views to the Parish Priest of Patrickstown, his agent, who had arrived in the village many a week before his employer, was holding out his hospitality to the Roman Catholic Curate.

Father Flannigan was a man of about five-and-twenty years of age, tall and thin, with very pale lips, and eyes which could not be made to look one straight in the face. The man who sat before him was a big burly

Scotchman, who had muscles of iron, and a hand that could grip like a vice.

The two sat exactly opposite each other, in the parlour of the agent's lodge, with a table between them, on which stood a couple of black bottles, some glasses, and a silver kettle of boiling water. The curtains were drawn across the windows, and lighted candles stood on the chimney-piece. How long the two friends had been sitting thus sociably together it is not our task to relate, suffice it to say that, at the time of which we speak, the bottles were far from full, that Mr MacCollop, the agent, was a good deal more honest, and decidedly less complimentary in his conversation than he had been in the beginning of the evening, and that the Curate was pale and reserved.

‘Of all the places on the earth,’ said MacCollop, throwing back his head and

thrusting his hands into his trouser pockets, 'I never came across one equal to this. Why, man, the folk are nae better than brute beasts!'

'Faith they're by no manes perfect, sor!' said the Curate, who spoke with a strong Irish brogue.

'And do you no think that they're a disgrace to yoursel', Mister Flannigan?'

The Curate closed his eyes pathetically.

'Tis not my mission, sor, to attend to the corporeal portion of my flock: the abode of the spirit is eternal, and demands our sole thoughts. Will you hand over the bottle, sor?'

'Hoots man, hoots!' exclaimed the agent, while the Curate was preparing another glass, 'isna it a man's mission to see that a body goes aboot with a clean face on him, and doesna live altogether like a soo. And sae

you believe in the confessional, Mister Flannigan ?'

'I am a Roman Catholic Priest, sor,' retorted his companion with emphasis, 'and if it's plaising to you I would rather remain silent on the subject.'

'Please yoursel', please yoursel', said the host, pushing over the hot water for the Curate to replenish his glass. Thereupon the conversation took another turn, which it is quite unnecessary for us to follow. The agent very soon altogether forgot his few blunt remarks upon the Church, and the two sat like bosom friends in social and amicable converse, until the midnight hour.

Then the Curate rose to go.

He opened the door, and, alas ! found that the rain was pouring in torrents. The priest looked blank, so MacCollop, not wishing to be out-done in the matter of

hospitality by the Irish people, generously offered his reverence a bed ; which offer being accepted, the two men retired in a friendly manner together.

There was only one bedroom in the lodge, but it contained two beds ; in one of which the burly form of the agent soon lay, and five minutes after the Priest, blowing out the candle, bounded ecstatically into the other. MacCollop had nothing sentimental about him, he was of the earth, earthly. He was a hearty eater, a good drinker, and a sound sleeper, and he hated above all to have his rest disturbed. On this occasion his head had not rested on the pillow for five minutes when he was wrapt in profound slumber. How long he lay he did not know : suddenly he awakened with a start. On retiring to rest he had forgotten to draw down the window blind or close the shutters, so, as the

rain had ceased to fall and the clouds had cleared from the sky, the moon, which was full and bright, poured her light through the small square panes and illuminated the room. But it was not the moonlight which had awakened MacCollop; he was conscious of a fumbling and a scraping and a creaking noise, which was going on close to the head of his bed. Sitting up he beheld a spectral figure, attired only in a white shirt, fumbling and searching about the room. He observed at the same time that the Curate's bed was empty.

‘Mister Flannigan,’ he called out, ‘what ails you, man? What are you about?’

Thus addressed, the Curate turned on his companion a face ghastly in the moonlight.

‘I am going to lave yer house, sor!’ he indignantly replied, at the same time aban-

doning his search, and beginning to put on his clothes.

‘Is the man mad?’ said the agent, rubbing his eyes, ‘or am I dreaming. Why on earth are you thinking to leave the hoose at this time of nicht?’

‘Because, sor,’ returned the Curate slowly, proceeding with his toilet, ‘’tis not fitting for a Priest of God to sleep beneath the roof of an unbeliever.’

MacCollop stared at his guest in silent wonder. He was amazed. He remembered that before he had fallen asleep his guest had wished him a hearty and friendly good-night—he now saw that unless he remained silent a quarrel would ensue. So he held his tongue. Meanwhile the Curate continued to dress, and when he had his clothes huddled upon him, rose to his feet, staggered across the room and

paused, with his back resting against the wall. Then MacCollop perceived that his guest was hopelessly intoxicated. The two men stared at each other for a few seconds ; but as MacCollop remained wisely silent, the Curate, without a word, shook the dust from his feet and passed from the house, banging the door loudly behind him. With a meaning smile and an astonished shrug of the shoulders, MacCollop, after having locked the door, lay down in bed and prepared to sleep again.

But sleep seemed more easily courted than obtained that night, for no sooner had the agent lain his head upon the pillow than his ears were greeted with a succession of hideous sounds, which were uttered just beneath his window. Rising and throwing open the window, he beheld Flannigan standing in the moonlight wildly waving his hands.

‘Well, Mister Flannigan!’ he exclaimed in an irritable tone, ‘what’s the matter noo? If you canna sleep like a decent body yoursel’, be good enough to let them that can!’

‘I want my bottle!’ exclaimed the Curate; ‘you accursed and ungodly man!’

‘Ceevil words, if you please, Mister Flannigan.’

‘Give me my bottle,’ continued the Curate wildly, ‘or I’ll curse you from the altar of my chapel!’

‘Your curse or your blessing are a’ ane to me, man. Oot o’ this; I’ll no hae my nichts disturbed for half-a-dozen priests!’

‘Give me my bottle, I say,’ shrieked the Curate, ‘or bejabers I’ll remain and curse ye till dawn!’

With this horrible threat ringing in his ears, MacCollop left the window, lit a candle

and looked about the room. At last, after a prolonged search, he found—the primary cause of his guest's extraordinary behaviour that night—a black bottle half full of whisky, tucked between the sheets, at the foot of his reverence's bed. Returning to the window, MacCollop threw it forth, making a good aim at the Curate's head; but by a dexterous movement, Father Flannigan caught the bottle, and clasping it affectionately to his breast, disappeared into the night.

MacCollop hastily shut the window, closed and fastened his shutters, and returning to his bed slept heavily till dawn.





CHAPTER V.

FATHER FLANNIGAN IS MAGNANIMOUS.

THE next day MacCollop had a good deal of work to do. First he had to call at every cabin on the estate and warn the tenants that the rent day had come, and then he had to make his report to his employer. Very soon after breakfast therefore he started off, mounted on a sturdy pony, which could have carried him blindfold across the bog. He called at several houses with very bad luck indeed; was clearly regarded as an intruder, and met with hostile looks where-

ever he went. The fact is, the success which had attended their efforts to intimidate the late proprietor had made these people somewhat tyrannous, and in their small way they had, through the medium of the Priest, got hold of some of the ideas about Home Rule, which their betters were engaged in scattering so profusely abroad. Instead of applying the philosophy of self-government to Ireland generally, they applied it to Patrickstown alone. It would be so much better, they thought, if a gentleman of an easy-going disposition and good Roman Catholic principles would buy up Patrickstown. Then their Priests would never be interfered with, and they would be allowed to remain as they were, to toil on from generation to generation.

Dragging at each remove a lengthening chain of filth and ignorance and superstition.

In the present state of things they were constantly being annoyed. The late proprietor of the village had been a Sassenach, *i.e.*, a Protestant Irishman, who had woefully misunderstood them—for not only had he made an attempt to finish the school, and thus acted in direct opposition to the wishes of the Priest, but he had actually enforced the sanitary law to the extent of making several of his tenants lodge their cattle in barns, while they occupied the houses alone. But, praise be to God, this had only lasted for a year or so. The Sassenach was soon brought to his senses, and as soon as he had fled the dear old customs had been continued.

And now, worse luck to him, another Sassenach had come to work against the peace of Ireland, her Priests and her people.

When MacCollop made his first round,

therefore—with the double bad odour of a bailiff and a Protestant master clinging to him—he received but a sorry welcome, and when he gazed with ill-concealed disgust at the tumble-down cabins and wretched bog-sodden land, and hinted at improvements, he made matters considerably worse. His demand for rent was met by a wail of woe. The potatoes were blighted, the land was ruined, the people could not pay rent, else they would starve.

‘If you canna pay it a’ in cash, at least gi’e the master some of your oats,’ said the agent at last. He was standing in a room of a wretched mud hut, with a great sow grunting at his feet. A woman crouched by the fire; a couple of sturdy giants, twins, sat on a form near her.

‘Faith, yer honour, we have little enough oats,’ said Shamus Moor, the biggest of

the twin-brothers, 'when we have paid our sheafs to the Priest.'

'And do you tell me noo,' said the fiery agent, 'that it's your intention to gi'e oats to the Priest, when you canna pay a penny o' the rent?'

'We give the Priest oats every year, yer honour.'

'Then you'll no do't this year, I say. You'll see to the guid o' the maister before the guid o' the Priest. Look you till the rent. I'm no the man to be humbugged, mind that.'

As the agent stalked away, the brothers exchanged glances. They were an evil-looking pair, with the overhanging brow and great square jaw of the Celtic peasantry strongly developed.

'He'll process us,' said one.

'Twill be the only time if he does, believe *me*, I'd—'

‘Would ye so? and what would the Priest say after?’

The other snapped his fingers.

‘That about the Priest. Is it Father Flannigan that would give me penance for laving my mark on *that* man? He’d absolve me wid never a word!’

Meanwhile MacCollop went on his way. When he had called at all the cabins, he turned his horse’s head towards his master’s dwelling.

He had not gone many yards along the road, and was still travelling at a walking pace, when he beheld a tall black figure coming straight towards him. He recognised the Curate. Father Flannigan was sober to-day; his face was pale, seraphic, and resigned. He was walking along with his eyes half-closed, in a half dream. MacCollop fixed his gaze on space, and was

about to pass without recognition of any kind, but to his amazement the Curate met him with outstretched hand.

‘ Good morning, sor ; hope I see you well, sor ?’

‘ Ay, weel enough,’ replied the agent ;
‘ but I’ll sleep alone in future.’

A strange look of supernatural slyness passed over the Curate’s face, then vanished.

‘ The whisky was good, sor, very good,’ he said. ‘ I bear you no ill-will, sor. Christian fortitude and forgiveness is a virtue in mankind. Good morning.’

And the good Curate stalked away, leaving the agent puzzled and amazed.

When he arrived at Cragduff House, he was shown into the drawing-room, where he found Mr O’Brien and Kate interviewing a tenant themselves.



CHAPTER VI.

A GOOD SAMARITAN.

WHILE MacCollop had been making his round of calls amongst the tenantry, Patrick O'Connor had been plodding across the hills to Cragduff House. Having arrived there he was ushered at once into the presence of the proprietor.

Although Mr O'Brien was considered a liberal-minded man, and not an ungenerous one either, he by no means threw his money carelessly about without considering where it might fall. He was an upholder of the

saying, that 'God helps those who help themselves,' and he disbelieved wholly in fostering laziness by indiscriminate charity, when, by a little dexterous manipulation, industry might be promoted.

When poor Patrick came slouching in with his sheepish face and shambling gait, Mr O'Brien's look was grave and cold. He answered the man's 'Caed fealta, yer honour,' with a chilly 'Good morning,' which at once brought up the warning words of the Priest to the poor man's heart.

Still, when Mr O'Brien cross-examined him, which he did minutely, Patrick answered all the questions with the heavy but straightforward honesty which was so characteristic of his nature, and it was only when Mr O'Brien reproved him for not having his children taught to read, that they might get their livelihood in foreign parts,

that the man set his teeth with some of the dogged determination of his race. For the creature, low as he was in the scale of humanity, had the passions of higher types, and his prevailing sentiment was love for his country and his kin.

However, the interview ended satisfactorily enough for Patrick, and as Mac-Collop entered the room, he was returning thanks to his new master for the kindness he had shown.

‘Remember,’ said Mr O’Brien, ‘I shall not continue to help you if you do not try to help yourself. I will not favour laziness, if I can help it; it is the greatest curse of man.’

Patrick—That’s thrue for you, sor.

Mr O’Brien—I will assist you until you have thought of some plan of providing for your family during the winter months.

Patrick—Many thanks to yer honour.

Mr O'Brien—And when you have discovered some plan, let me know.

Patrick—I will indeed, sor.

Whereupon Patrick made his bow and retired.

He was quite convinced now that Mr O'Brien did not understand the poor Con-naught boy ; he had not even *shaken hands* with him !

When Patrick was gone, Mr O'Brien, turning to his agent, got from him the report of his morning's work.

MacCollop had a dark account to give. The tenants were all—or nearly all—living in huts that were only fit for cattle, and which, indeed, their cattle shared with them ; they were one and all bewailing the blight on the potatoes ; and not one would either produce a farthing of rent, or hold out hopes

that it might be got in future,—a blank prospect, indeed, for the new proprietor.

But Mr O'Brien was a philanthropist in his way. His main object in coming to Patrickstown had been to benefit his tenants, not himself, and his ideas were still the same. He took the accounts of the treasury in perfect good humour.

‘You’ve done very well, MacCollop, very well, indeed,’ he said; ‘but having given them warning, we won’t press the poor creatures for the rent, provided they will do what we wish. I want to improve them, not bring them lower still. I want to teach them cleanliness, which is next door to Godliness, you know, and give them some idea of the world they live in. To begin with, we will turn the cattle out of the houses, and furbish up the school, so that the poor little creatures who are growing up may get

some chance of an education. Leave the rent question alone and see to that. If they treat me well I don't wish to be hard upon them.'

'Vera weel,' replied the agent, 'I'll do't, but it'll altogether astonish me if the folk are as ameenable as you think, for, believe me, Mr O'Brien, as long as thae lazy loots are harboured here, there'll be nae hope for the land. If you took my advice, you'd have nae compunction in clearing them oot to a man!'

'Nonsense, nonsense!' returned Mr O'Brien. 'Try my plan first; we may come to yours if it fails.'





CHAPTER VII.

THE PRIEST ASSERTS HIMSELF.

SO the edict went forth, and on the morning of the next day, MacCollop, acting as the mouth-piece for Mr O'Brien, informed the tenants of that gentleman of the resolve that had been made, viz., that human beings and cattle must sleep apart; and that as soon as the school-house was finished, every child under the age of twelve must attend.

These announcements wrought a marked effect upon the tenants.

The intimation that their children must

attend school was heeded but little ; the school - house was not even built, nor, judging from the former efforts in that direction, was it ever likely to be. But the question of the cattle was much more important, and required immediate consideration ; one or two leading spirits suggested a meeting, but they afterwards thought better of it, and at first only offered a mild protest to the agent's orders.

‘In troth, yer honour,’ said Shamus Moor ; ‘ ’tis not yerself that would be so hard on poor boys like us. ’Tis thè cattle that’s been accustomed to nice warm fires ; and if we turned them out into sheds, they’d surely die ; and the year is bad enough athout that, yer honour, since the praties is blighted, and we have little enough left for food ? ’

‘And is it no easy enough for you to

put fires in the sheds? You're never charged a bawbee for the peat !'

' But we have to *draw* it, yer honour !'

' And is it no better for you to be doing that than idling away your time from morn to night, as you do? You're no fit to hae cattle at all if you canna mind them, and if they're no weel oot o' this before this day month you'll suffer for't, mind that.'

And MacCollop turned his back indignantly upon the tenant, and, picking his way through the heaps of filth which surrounded the door, hurried off on his duty.

He called at every house on Mr O'Brien's estate, and gave due warning ; then he drew up half-a-dozen notices and had them posted on the police barrack, the chapels, and other conspicuous buildings, and left the rest to time.

If the second announcement was unheeded by the tenants, it was not by the Priest. When, just two days after the edict had gone forth, Father Malloy passed by the school-house and saw some dozen of Mr O'Brien's tenants busily at work thereon, his jovial face grew black as thunder, and he called out in such forbidding tones that the men immediately dropped their tools and ran away like a flock of frightened sheep. Father Malloy stalked on to Cragduff House, and by the time he had arrived there his momentary irritation had worn away.

‘My dear sir,’ he said, ‘I am heartily sorry to see you beginning this work. You will cause quite a revolution in the village; and although the people have been tolerably quiet hitherto, there is no saying what might happen if their spirits were once aroused.’

‘But I am working for them, not against them,’ replied Mr O’Brien.

The Priest shrugged his shoulders.

‘In your sense of the word, perhaps, but not in theirs; and I really think that their own plan is, after all, the best. Educational advancement would never answer here, never. I know their spirits, and I know their natures; they are docile enough now, once advance them a step or two, once let them feel their own powers, and they will assume them, take the lead to-morrow and cast us aside; all our hold over them would be gone at once!’

Mr O’Brien listened quietly to this. When the Priest paused, he said,—

‘I see; you believe in the repression of the people and the elevation of the Church. Do you think that is just? Remember God has given them faculties as He has

given them to us. He has given them eyes to see with, ears to hear with, and minds to understand ; therefore I think it unjust that one class of humanity should set its foot upon the neck of another, because they fear that stronger minds might rise up and overthrow them. I believe in letting every man take his chance in this world, the rich man as well as the poor man, consequently I mean to do what I can for the poor benighted creatures who live on my land, whether you think it wise or no !’

‘Surely you have misinterpreted my words,’ returned the Priest. ‘I myself would never countenance the suppression and consequent extinction of the gifts given by God to man, but we must remember that these gifts of which you speak have their various uses. The

labourer was clearly sent by God as a human instrument to keep life going in man, consequently he is gifted with less intelligence than his fellow - creatures, in order that his mind may not be above his station. Therefore, if we in our blindness endeavoured to cultivate these gifts, evil of some kind would certainly be the result.

‘On this point I differ with you,’ said Mr O’Brien.

‘So I observe,’ returned the Priest ; ‘but I must confess that I should have been better pleased had you tried your experiment elsewhere.’

Mr O’Brien—Why, if everybody was as quiet and steady-going as you are, there would be no discoveries and no advancement in the world.

The Priest (smiling)—The world might be the better for it.

Mr O'Brien — Pardon me ; I do not think there is one point upon which we can agree.

The Priest—Perhaps not, sir. Remember I was not the originator of this dispute (*more warmly*). Let me be quite frank ; I do not think it fair and honourable conduct to interfere with my work as you have done.

Mr O'Brien—All I have done as yet is to turn the cattle into cow-sheds and make arrangements for educating the children.

The Priest—And in your zeal you have entirely forgotten the fact that you belong to the Protestant faith.

Mr O'Brien—I beg your pardon ; I have done nothing of the kind ; but I don't see what difference the creed can make when the spirit of Christianity is the same. Teach the children Roman Catholicism,

with all my heart, but at any cost teach them to read ; but to think of a civilised village without a school in the nineteenth century—why, it's most disheartening !

The Priest—At any rate, I am here to request you to desist.

Mr. O'Brien—What ! from building the school ?

The Priest—Certainly.

Mr O'Brien—Then I most emphatically refuse. Good morning, sir. Perhaps in future you and I had better not discuss these subjects again.

On the following morning Mr O'Brien received a formal letter from the Priest requesting him to leave the school - house alone. As this was unheeded, the operations were soon forcibly stopped. The Priest, he was informed, was busy collecting a sum of money, which was to be

used for the purpose of finishing the school. Meantime the building must remain incomplete.

‘Do you know, Kate, I am afraid Father Malloy is a rascal,’ said Mr O’Brien.

‘And yet he seems so nice when one is with him; does he not, papa?’

‘Yes; and that’s how he influences the people, poor wretches! If they only knew it, he is about the worst enemy they have in the world.’





CHAPTER VIII.

AND ADVISES POOR PATRICK.

THREE weeks had passed since Patrick O'Connor had drawn his first supplies from Cragduff House, and since that time the problem of how to live had never once entered his mind. His family were in clover again, and the rotten potatoes which were boiled every day generally fell to the share of the fowls; for Kate O'Brien had something to give whenever she passed the door of the hut, and regularly every Saturday Patrick visited Cragduff House, and returned to his home, laden

with sufficient food to keep his family for several days.

On his third visit to the house, Patrick was again shown into Mr O'Brien's presence, and again confronted with the question as to how he was going to maintain his family during the winter months.

'In troth, yer honour, I don't know,' said Patrick, scratching his head.

'But you ought to know,' returned Mr O'Brien. 'What is the good of your having brains if you don't use them? What would you do if I refused to give you anything more?'

'Badly enough, in troth.'

'I suppose you would starve.'

'We might, indeed.'

Mr O'Brien tapped his foot impatiently upon the floor. The utter imperturbability of the man irritated him. He was about

to dismiss him summarily from his presence when a thought struck him.

‘You have six children at home, have you not?’ he asked.

‘Yes, indeed, sor,’ returned Patrick.

‘And have you any work for them to do during the winter?’

‘Divil a hap’orth, yer honour!’

‘Well, listen to me. If you will send those six children of yours to Ballygally school every day—it’s only five miles off—and have them taught to write and read, I will undertake to keep you all until your potatoes come in again.’

‘Oh, God Almighty bless yer honour!’ and Patrick, hugging his provisions, trudged away home in ecstatic delight.

He had got about half way to his own house, when who should he meet but Father Malloy. The Priest shook hands

with him heartily, and asked him how he was getting on. Thus encouraged to speak of himself, Patrick told the Priest of Mr O'Brien's kindness to him, and lastly of that gentleman's offer to send his children to Ballygally school.

At this piece of news Father Malloy's jovial face clouded, but he asked, quietly enough,—

‘And you refused, Patrick?’

‘I did *not*, yer riv'rence; I said the little children should go.’

‘Very well,’ said the Priest, turning away, ‘send your children there, but remember you will repent it!’

‘Yer riv'rence,’ cried Patrick, running after him. ‘Does yer riv'rence not wish them to go?’

‘Of course it's not right for them to go, Patrick. If it had been, don't you think

that I should have sent them before. Why, it's a *Protestant* school !'

'Is it, indeed, yer riv'rence ?' returned Patrick, shocked. He did not exactly know what Protestant meant, but it had a bad sound, and that was enough for him.

'I was afraid from the first that that man would do harm ; but if you listen to him, Patrick, remember this, if you obey him, you must do without me !'

Wishing Patrick a hurried good morning, he walked away. He was angry ; more so than he cared to show to his parishioner. It had annoyed him beyond measure to think that Mr O'Brien should dream of building a school at all, even although it was to be under Roman Catholic auspices, for it was quite contrary to his wishes that the news should get bruited abroad that the Catholic

village of Patrickstown had been without a school until a Protestant Irishman had built it; but that he should so far presume upon the Priest's dominions as to wish to send his people to a Protestant school, was rather more than human endurance could bear. It was clearly to be a hand-to-hand fight, and a trial as to who would be the victor.

Meanwhile Patrick trudged home with his load, and while his olive branches were disposing of a part of it, he worked his puzzled brain as to what it would be best for him to do.

Of one thing he felt certain, that he could not act in opposition to the wishes of his Priest, for whose person and power he had a sort of sacred reverence, that years of enlightenment would never have erased from his mind. Ever since his child-

hood he had been taught to reverence his 'clergy,' to obey him, to be guided by him, and him alone, until the Priest had become so much a part of himself that he could not shake him away. Not that he had any wish to do so ; without the Priest his life would have been a blank.

It was not until several days later that he summoned up courage sufficient to go up to Cragduff House again to tell Mr O'Brien of his changed mind. Mr O'Brien had just finished dinner, so Patrick was shown at once into the dining-room, where he stood staring and speechless.

'Well, Patrick,' said Mr O'Brien, 'what do you want with me ?'

'Jist to say, sor,' returned Patrick uneasily, 'begging yer honour's pardon, that the little childher cannot go to the school, yer honour.'

‘And why not, pray?’

‘Well, indeed, sor—in troth, yer honour, his riv’rence, he does say it is not *right* for them to go!’

‘Oh, he does, does he?’

‘He does indeed, yer honour,’ said Patrick, relieved, and fairly considering that his reverence’s objection settled the matter.

‘And did he tell you why he objected to their going?’

‘He said, yer honour, that ’twas a *Protistant* school!’

‘And that is the reason they mustn’t go.’

‘It is, sor.’

‘Then, if he is so particular why doesn’t he finish this school and so educate the children in a Roman Catholic one? But he won’t; he wants to keep you all without any education, that’s the fact, and he is doing it under the guise of religion.

And so you mean to do what he tells you ?'

The man hung his head.

'Don't you think yourself it would be better for your children to learn to write and read instead of idling away their time, and growing up in wretched ignorance, as they are doing now ?'

'But the Priest says, yer honour—'

'The Priest ! don't talk to me about the Priest ! So long as you rely upon *him* for help, you will never be one grain better than you are. What are your brains given you for if you won't use them ? You ought to think and see things for yourself.'

'That's true for you, sor.'

'What is the good of your saying that when you know very well that you don't mean it. There, go away, you irritate me beyond measure ; you had better think

again how you are going to keep those children through the winter, since you won't send them to school.'

Without another word, poor Patrick retired.





CHAPTER IX.

THE PRIEST AND HIS PEOPLE.

WHEN Patrick was gone, Mr O'Brien sat for a time thinking over the interview. He was already beginning to feel the difficulties of improving the condition of a people who were not possessed of enough self-will to stretch out a hand to help themselves. Mr O'Brien had planned a good deal before he came to Patrickstown ; he was going to be a sort of professional philanthropist, a moral regenerator of his district. Yet he had already been two months in the place, and

he had achieved positively nothing. For the present he confessed to himself that this educational scheme must be abandoned, but he inwardly vowed that his other plans should not be so easily repressed. He would try kindness with the people first; if that did not succeed he would match them with a firmness fully equal to their own.

While Mr O'Brien was thinking about his tenants at Cragduff House, his agent was going through the same performance up at the lodge. MacCollop was sitting in his cosy parlour, with his windows curtained, his candles lit, and his table strewn with papers. He was a business man, and he meant to execute his work in a proper business-like spirit. When the morrow arrived just a month would have passed since he had stuck up the white notices for

the benefit of the inhabitants of Patricks-town, and he knew that not one man on the estate had paid any more attention to those written notices and his own verbal warnings than if they had neither seen nor heard. Therefore he had provided himself with summonses, one of which he intended to leave at every dwelling on the morrow, in order to show the people that the law could enforce what he could not exact.

While he was thus engaged, his attention was arrested by a wild yelling and roaring. Presently he heard heavy footsteps rushing round to the back of his cottage. He left the parlour, went along towards the kitchen, and was just in time to see three ragged half-naked giants and an old man and woman rush wildly in at the kitchen door, and sit down breathless on the forms near to the fire.

‘Weel, weel,’ inquired MacCollop, ‘and what is a’ the noise about?’

‘’Tis Father Flannigan, yer honour,’ gasped one of the young Anaks in question.

‘And what’s about *him*?’

‘He’s just taken a drop of the potheen, yer honour, and he’s a bit lively in troth. He came to the house last night, and turned the whole o’ us out o’ it, and because we just went back a while ago to see and give the bastes a bit o’ fodder, for in troth they must be hungry enough by this time, he set on us wid a big stick and swore he would bate us to death. He’s out looking for us in the village, so we thought yer honour would just let us come in here!’

‘And sae ye skunked awa’ and let that drunken scoondrel tak’ possession o’ the hoose?’

‘The Praist is it?—yes, indeed. What else could we do, sor?’

‘What else, you sneaking cooards, you! Could you no tak’ him by the scruff o’ the neck and shake his life oot o’ him? Could you no punch his nose for him? Could you no kick him oot o’ your hoose decently, as a decent man would?’

While the agent spoke the man and the woman looked as if they would by no means object to rehearsing these performances upon himself.

‘Lave a hand on the *Priest!*’ said one of the party; ‘the Lord forbid that I should ever be known to do the likes o’ that!’

At this point the conversation was interrupted. The yells and execrations which, since they had been first heard, had gradually grown louder and louder, suddenly

culminated in a violent banging at the front door of the lodge.

The people in the kitchen started up in terror.

‘Lave the door, yer honour, lave the door. ’Tis Father Flannigan, and sure enough he’ll take your life!’

‘Hoot, hoot,’ exclaimed the agent, ‘I’m no’ sae cooardly as yoursel’s, thank God. He’ll hae my life, will he? We’ll see aboot that. He’ll find his match in Sandie MacCollop!’

He stalked along to his front door, and fearlessly threw it open wide. Around the house a semicircle of people were gathered, whose demoniac yells had been heard at the lodge some time before; while in the space before them, and right before the door of the house, stood the figure upon which all eyes were turned—that of the Curate.

Father Flannigan was pale as death, and in the moonlight he looked quite spectral. His stock was flying from his neck, his hair was wild, his eyes staring.

‘And what the deil is a’ this row aboot?’ asked the agent, utterly taken aback at sight of the ghastly figure. The Curate glared as if he were affected with catalepsy.

‘Wretched atheist!’ he ejaculated, ‘accursed blasphemer! You—you—are an unbeliever, sor!’

He stared aimlessly for a moment. Suddenly he clenched his fist, and made a feeble blow at MacCollop’s nose, missed his aim, doubled up, and fell himself, flat on his face, across the threshold of the house! Before the agent could say a word, however, he sprang elastically to his feet, seized him by the throat, and almost choked him.

A struggle ensued. MacCollop had the best of it, but not wishing to hurt the Curate, he called on the assembled crowd to come and take him away.

‘If you leave him to me I’ll choke the breath oot o’ him, the scoondrel. He’ll no wish to tackle *me* again!’

No one stirred. The Curate, maddened by the struggle, bit and scratched and twisted, until, with a scientific twist, MacCollop laid him prone upon the ground.

Then there arose a yell.

‘Down wid him, down wid him! he has killed the good Praist, bad luck to him!’

In a moment the agent felt both blows and stones raining upon him, and knowing well enough that his unaided strength would go nowhere in such a crowd, he was glad to retire gracefully from the scene, and bang to and bolt his doors, inwardly praising the

forethought of his predecessor, who had had the admirable tact to erect iron shutters for a time of need.

For more than half-an-hour stones and blows rattled upon the window and the door without effect. Then the crowd dispersed.

When all was quiet again, MacCollop finished what work he had to do and went to bed.





CHAPTER X.

A MIRACLE WORKER.

IN course of time, and not so very long a time either, these events came to the ears of Mr O'Brien, and set him wondering again. If it had been a marvel to him that the people should submit so quietly to the absolute power of the Priest, it was still more astonishing to him that such a man as Father Flannigan should gain any influence over the most unenlightened mind. For, incredible as it may appear, Father Flannigan was a popular man in Patrickstown, being quite as

much revered, perhaps even more feared, than his less demonstrative and better educated superior.

The secret of his influence was for some time unknown, even to the Parish Priest himself: at last it oozed out.

The good and holy Father Flannigan was not only able to give his people absolution for any sin which they might be tempted to commit, but he was endowed with the special power of working *miracles*.

He himself averred, and it was afterwards generally believed, that he had, on more than one occasion, raised up a man from the dead! Certain it was that on one special Friday morning, when there had been no fish forthcoming, he had commanded his servant to go to a small spring which supplied the village with water, and

that when she went she found, floating dead upon the surface of the water, a fine fresh trout, which was just the size for his reverence's dinner !

On another occasion he had commanded the wind to veer round and blow from north to north-west, and the general belief was that his command had been obeyed !

Again a man had, heedless of the Curate's commands, set his cow to graze in a field opposite his reverence's dwelling. About a fortnight afterwards that very cow was crushed to death by falling over a cliff. When the Curate received news of the catastrophe he quietly remarked that in future it would be better for his people to obey him in all things.

It was little wonder then that a man, so reckless in the exercise of power, gained

supreme sway over beings so benighted as were the inhabitants of Patrickstown. At first they were amazed, then terrified, and at last they looked upon him with a reverence darkly tempered with awe. If it had been his pleasure to strike down one half of the people who composed his flock, not one would have dared to raise his hand even to defend himself or any member of his household. He had been known, in his wild fits, to beat an able-bodied man and lay him up with injuries for days, and yet such was the superstitious awe which surrounded him, that when the affair was inquired into by his superior, the victim himself, still suffering from his wounds, had declared that Father Flannigan had never laid a finger on him in his life.

This state of authority resulted in worldly profit. If any householder, during the

autumn collection of tithes, was loath to yield up the exorbitant amount demanded, Father Flannigan had but to make a mystical sign upon the threshold and walk away. Before he had gone a hundred yards he was certain to be recalled, and receive the full amount of his claim.

When the knowledge of these proceedings came to light it caused a good deal of disgust, even in the mind of Father Malloy, who, although he was by no means faultless himself, and although, as we have shown, he sustained his own power even at the cost of his people, had a mind far above petty deception or blasphemous pretension. Still the Parish Priest said little—perhaps his very knowledge of the people kept him silent, and Father Flannigan ran uninterruptedly on in his wild career, never once

having been opposed or interfered with in any way whatever until he came in contact with the phlegmatic Scotch agent, MacCollop.





CHAPTER XI.

THE EPISCOPAL INQUIRY.

TO many readers of this narrative the events chronicled in the preceding chapters may appear incredible, but we most firmly maintain that scenes even more outrageous in character than those we have described actually did, and do occur, in wild outlying villages, such as that where the scene of this story is laid.

Father Flannigan had been for seven years the Curate of Patrickstown; several times during that period faint whispers of

his reprehensible conduct had got abroad ; but as no definite or formal report had reached the Bishop, he had deemed silence the best course to take. The Curate's management of his people during his sober moments was dexterous in the extreme. He was so friendly and free with them ; he never by any chance interfered with their affairs ; he fostered all their prejudices and superstitions ; he seldom imposed penance, and readily gave them absolution for their sins.

Had he been lucky enough to be always surrounded by none but his own flock, no definite report of his misdemeanours would ever have got abroad ; but, unfortunately for him, the present owner of Patrickstown was of a different metal. When Mr O'Brien heard from his agent an account of Father Flannigan's exploits

he was shocked and amazed, and he took the liberty of remonstrating with the Curate upon his way of life. But when he saw that his remonstrances were of no avail, that instead of improving things grew worse and worse, he thought it right that such reprehensible conduct should be exposed.

Accordingly he himself wrote to the Bishop, stating the whole case, and demanding that the Curate should be removed.

In reply to this letter the Bishop intimated that he would personally visit the district, and make strict inquiries into the case.

No sooner did this piece of news get bruited abroad, than the Curate, livid with rage against the meddler, forswore all intoxicating liquor for the time being, and

spent all his time visiting amongst his flock.

On the morning of the Bishop's arrival the Curate was as sober as an angel. The occasion was a solemn one. The Bishop had taken up his quarters in the dwelling of the Parish Priest; and thither he beheld Father Flannigan, wearing his sober Priestly costume, and carrying his breviary, stalking like a spectre, followed by crowds of people dressed up in their best, and gathering in from all parts of the hills.

The case being laid before the Bishop, Father Flannigan, with all the meekness of an injured saint, referred his lordship to his flock. He would say nothing, he vowed, in his own defence. His sheep might attest the worth of their shepherd.

Then it was that Mr O'Brien first got

such astounding proof of the straightforward veracity of the Irish peasant.

For when the Bishop appeared at the door of the house, and faced the immense concourse of people which had gathered there, people who had been beaten and abused by the Curate for seven years, one and all fell upon their knees and begged hard and unanimously that Father Flannigan might be suffered to remain !

For a moment Mr O'Brien forgot the cause in the sight. It was no common one. Upwards of a thousand people, inspired at the same moment with the same impulse, working to one end ! For even as one man might fall upon his knees, did that vast gathering fall, a thousand faces turned at the same moment upward, a thousand voices uttered unanimously a supplicating wail of woe.

The Bishop, standing in the doorway, facing his people, bowed his head quietly until the tumult had somewhat subsided. Then he spoke.

Bishop (in a loud voice)—But I am informed that he is in the habit of creating degrading scenes in the village.

Voices (wildly)—No, no, no!

Bishop—I hear that he ill-treats you.

Voices—It's a lie, your holiness.

Bishop—That he is even in the habit of striking you!

Voices—And that's a lie too, yer holiness; bad luck to him that told it ye.

Bishop—It is the duty of a Priest to promote the happiness of his people.

Voices—Hurrah! that's thrue for you.

Bishop—And not to set them a bad example by degrading himself in their eyes.

Voices—And that's what he never done, yer holiness. More power to him.

Bishop—If the accounts I have heard are true, it would be my duty to remove him.

Voices (excitedly)—No, no! It's all lies, yer holiness—all lies, every word. Lave us our Priest; for the love of God lave us our Priest.

Bishop (smiling)—Since you all wish it, he shall remain for the present amongst you.

Voices—Oh, God Almighty bless yer holiness!

Bishop—But remember, if further complaints are made the Reverend Father Flannigan will have to be removed. God bless you, my children, God bless you!

And with hands extended towards the people, the Bishop backed into the dwelling and disappeared.

After this little incident, Mr O'Brien found his residence in Patrickstown considerably less pleasant than it had been heretofore. Wherever he went dark looks met him, and threatening language was made use of on several occasions. Whenever he demanded the service of any one of his tenants it was, if possible, denied; nay, if he had been seen sinking in a bog, or drowning at sea, no hand would have been extended to save him.

One morning on visiting the beach he found the bottom of his boat, a large six-oared yawl, smashed to splinters. The police were set to work, but no culprit found.

He went for a day's shooting, and to his amazement his two setters fell dead before him on the moor. They were found to have been poisoned by strychnine, though how or by whom administered was never

discovered. He had, for the first time since he came to Patrickstown, to fasten his windows and doors at night, lest some bold spirit might be induced to quietly attempt his life.

‘Papa,’ said Kate, when she saw with terror to what a pass things had come, ‘will you not take my advice now and leave the place?’

‘Certainly not, Kate,’ returned her father decidedly. ‘I mean to stand my ground to the last and fight the battle through.’





CHAPTER XII.

FATHER MALLOY GIVES MORE ADVICE.

EVENTS such as these had but a transitory effect upon the mind of the agent. Throughout the whole inquiry, MacCollop remained as cool as ever. One morning, when the air was tolerably clear again, he put his summonses in his pockets and started off on his rounds.

He found that his first surmises had been correct, not a vestige of a cowshed appeared anywhere, and the huts looked

even more filthy and dilapidated and tumble-down than they had done a month before. Quite aware that words of any kind would be heeded about as much as an idle puff of wind, he quietly served his documents and said nothing, treating with supreme unconcern the various greetings which met him as he went from house to house. As he disappeared he left behind him a perfect wail of woe. Having done his work he made his report to Mr O'Brien, and then went home.

There was great excitement amongst the peasantry that night. Shortly after night-fall numerous croft-holders gathered in the hut of Shamus Moor, to talk the affairs over.

The two gigantic twins were looked upon as leading spirits in Patrickstown.

Their advice was often sought and generally followed; but in the present instance the brothers were at a loss what to do. Having had no idea that such stringent measures would be so summarily adopted, they had given little thought to the matter, and consequently, when the neighbours dropped in to solicit their advice, they spent hour after hour without arriving at any important conclusion. It was not until the whole party had separated that an idea, which he determined to act upon at once, entered the brain of Shamus Moor himself. He would lay the affair before the Priest, and be guided by his 'clergy's' advice. Accordingly, without a moment's delay, he set off to interview his reverence.

Father Malloy—for it was to the Parish

Priest, not to the Curate, that he took his wrongs—was sitting at home in more ease than elegance when Shamus arrived. His priestly coat was exchanged for an old ragged dressing-gown, his feet were in a dilapidated pair of carpet slippers, he had a short briar-root pipe in his mouth, his shirt collar was undone, and he was busy reading the *Nation*. When Shamus entered, he shook hands with him, pointed to a chair, and commenced proceedings by giving him a glass of whisky.

‘Well, Shamus, and what is it you want with me?’ asked the Priest in Irish. ‘Out with it, boy, for I was just thinking about bed when I heard your knock at the door!’

‘I’ll not detain yer riv’rence,’ returned the man quietly; ‘but I wanted just one

little word of advice. That murdering baste o' a bailiff, bad luck to him, has been round to-day and served every man o' us wid one o' *these*.'

He held forth the paper, which the Priest took, opened, and read. It was a summons for the year's rent, and attached to it a written statement assuring the tenants that if they did not show to the sanitary inspector just cause why the cattle were not properly housed, they would be summoned without further warning to appear and defend themselves before the justices of the court.

'Humph!' said the Priest, shrugging his shoulders and handing the document back with a smile, 'this is a bad job for you, Shamus!'

'What does yer riv'rence think that he manes to do entirely?'

‘Turn you all out, I suppose. I anticipated something of the sort from the first. Protestants have no right to own the land.’

‘But he *can't* do that, yer riv'rence.’

‘Of course he can, if you don't pay your rent!’

The man's face darkened ominously.

‘They're wantin' to improve the houses, yer riv'rence.’

‘I thought so,’ returned the Priest, significantly and quietly.

There was silence for a time. At last Shamus Moor spoke again.

‘If we paid the rint itself, sure they couldn't turn us out, yer riv'rence.’

‘Not exactly; but they could do the same thing!’

‘What's that, sor?’ asked the man eagerly.

‘Raise the rent every year until it got too heavy for you to pay!’

‘Will they do *that*, yer riv’rence?’

The Priest shrugged his shoulders.

‘God knows!’

Again there was silence, which was again broken by Shamus Moor.

‘Would it be too much for me to ask yer riv’rence to spake to the master himself?’

‘Impossible, Shamus; quite impossible,’ returned the Priest, rising. ‘I ventured to remonstrate with him at first, for I saw that he misunderstood you, but he showed me the door, and requested me not to enter his house again!’

‘Did he dare to do *that* to yer riv’rence?’ said the man, starting up.

‘He did indeed, therefore I can say nothing more. Good-night, Shamus, re-

member the matter is entirely in your own hands!'

With these words, uttered with significant emphasis, the two shook hands and parted.





CHAPTER XIII.

CROSS PURPOSES.

IN some of the disturbed districts in Ireland many a man had been shot down in cool blood for far less offence than MacCollop had already committed, and yet for several weeks after he had served the obnoxious summonses upon the people, the agent walked about unthreatened and unharmed. It was not that the inhabitants of Patrickstown lacked courage of a certain sort, or that their hearts were less hardened than were those

of their neighbours ; they were simply unfamiliar with the sort of crime which they were thirsting to commit. But the thought was in their hearts.

Ever since his interview with the Priest, Shamus Moor had felt perfectly satisfied in his mind that until either the agent or Mr O'Brien was disposed of, there would be little peace for the poor tenants who came under their sway. If this was only the beginning, what would be the end ? Partly through the inconsiderateness of the agent in demanding his master's rent, but mainly through the quiet insinuations of the Priest, the people had already begun to regard both Mr O'Brien and his agent as their natural enemies. Their hereditary prejudices against the Sassenachs in general, and this one Protestant in particular, arose tenfold within them. Father Mal-

loy, who had by no means been idle amongst his people, and who had a pretty accurate knowledge of their truculent dispositions, could not but wonder at their quiet submission. He deemed his influence less than it was; he could not perceive as yet that it was creeping slowly and surely through the parish and poisoning the wholesome life of every home.

It soon became apparent that the people were being drawn two ways, and knew not which to follow. Father Malloy, striking direct at what he deemed the root of the evil, directed all his work against Mr O'Brien, while Father Flannigan, who, after all, was in this matter the less crafty and far-seeing of the two, followed up his own private wrongs and brought all his influence against the mass-hating MacCollop. Ever since that

night when the two men first met the good Curate's hatred against the agent had slowly increased, and though during his sober moments he dared not openly proclaim it, he by no means exchanged it for a mood of Christianity. By dint of quiet insinuations he was urging the people on to an action which he was too great a coward to commit himself.

Still, as we have said, no violent deed was done. The inhabitants of Patricks-town had not even served their apprenticeship to crime, and consequently they were slow to move.

Quite unconscious of all that was going on around him, MacCollop, the phlegmatic, quietly continued his work. The only precaution which he took was to close his iron shutters and iron doors at night; and, after all, this was not from fear

of the people, but on account of the Priest !

After he had delivered his summonses he waited patiently for a time. No attention was paid to them. Then he went down and consulted Mr O'Brien. After a long consultation, Mr O'Brien said,—

‘Well, MacCollop, I’ll give the poor wretches one other chance. Go to them to-morrow, promise them, in my name, that this year’s rent shall be made easy to them if they will accede to my conditions, viz., to house their cattle and themselves decently, to improve their houses a bit, and try to enrich instead of impoverish the soil, and above all to send all the little children to school !’

‘Weel, sir, to my mind you are far too guid to them. A heavier hand would make more mark !’

‘Never mind—let us try!’

When MacCollop laid these conditions before the people they promised him an answer the next day; meanwhile they consulted together, interviewed Father Malloy again, and the very next morning Shamus Moor went up to the lodge with the answer for all.

It was a flat refusal.

‘Weel, weel,’ said the exasperated agent, ‘tak’ my word but you’ll suffer for this!’

Two days after, as his rent was still unpaid, Shamus Moor missed two fine heifers, which he found had been seized by the officer and imprisoned in the outbuildings of the lodge. When he applied for them he was told that in two days they would be sold to realise the amount of the rent! Cursing the agent, and inwardly swearing

to have his revenge, the man went home and began to turn over in his mind the best means of ridding the village—and indeed the persecuted world—of such a tyrant !





CHAPTER XIV.

MACCOLLOP UNDER FIRE.

DAYS of dubious calm succeeded this event. MacCollop naturally believed that his measures were succeeding. The tenants were unusually polite to him, and made the most glowing promises about the partial payment of their rent. The old adage about the worst-beaten dog being the most faithful occurred to him, and he began to think that stringent measures were the only ones to be adopted. He did not know that an event was brewing which was to upset

once and for ever all his fine philosophical plans.

One day, the third from that on which he had last spoken with Shamus Moor, he was making his way down to Patrick O'Connor's hut. Hitherto Patrick had been spared the troubles of the tenantry. The sanitary laws concerning cattle had not affected *him*, for in fact he had only half-a-dozen hens left; and, at Miss O'Brien's request, he had not been served with a summons for his rent; but MacCollop, being a far-seeing man, suspected that if Patrick's memory was not rubbed up, he might begin to convince himself either that the rent was paid, or that the homestead was his own. So when the agent's more important work was done, he bethought himself of Patrick, and strolled leisurely to interview him.

There were very few people out in the

fields that day. All the place seemed strangely quiet. On reaching Patrick's hut he found the ragged family crouching in the broken-down dilapidated dwelling-hut ; Patrick himself was out. However, he was not far away. He was digging a few potatoes for the dinner, they told him, in the little field there just 'above the shore.'

Thither MacCollop bent his steps. Sure enough there stood poor Patrick on his little bit of land shaking the potato vines, and regarding the blighted 'fruit of the earth,' with a heavy heart. His eyes looked very hollow, his cheeks very white to-day, for the pinch of extreme poverty was beginning to tell upon him. Although he still received assistance from Mr O'Brien it was not sufficient to keep himself and his six hearty children in perfect nutrition. He could seldom now smoke a pipe of tobacco, or get

a good draught of cow's milk, a few blighted potatoes being his principal food.

When the agent came up to his side Patrick touched his forelock and gave him the usual greeting; but when MacCollop mentioned the rent, he pointed to the potatoes before him.

'See, now! that's all I've got for myself and me six little childher. If the crop'll be bettther next year, plaise God, I'll get the rent for ye!'

'Vera weel,' replied the agent, 'mak it up as soon as ye can, for those that canna pay must go—that's all.'

With which words the agent turned to go. The land on which he stood was a long, narrow field just above the sea-shore, protected by a high bank on one side and a deep ditch on the other.

MacCollop walked for about a hundred

yards or so along the ridge of potatoes where Patrick was digging, when he turned his back upon the high bank and made his way towards the ditch. He had taken a few steps only when there was a loud report, and the high hat which he wore was torn from his head and blown along the wind like a wounded crow. But he himself stood unharmed!

After a moment of stupor he glanced about him. There stood Patrick staring, spade in hand, to all intents and purposes innocent and amazed; and there above the bank still hung a little cloud of smoke. MacCollop was an energetic man. In a moment he had leapt the bank and had seized, in his herculean grip, no less a person than the sullen giant Shamus Moor!

‘What do you mane,’ exclaimed Shamus,

with a wild whine, 'by trating a poor boy like this?'

'You murdering scoondrel,' exclaimed the agent. 'You blethering brutal thief o' the world! you'll no hae anither chance to fire on *me!*'

'Fire! me fire!'

'Silence, and look there!' said MacCollop, pointing to an empty gun at his feet. 'You'll cry anither gait when you're swinging by the neck. Come wi' me!'

By this time a small crowd of wondering villagers had crowded about the pair, and were asking, in well-assumed innocence, what it all meant. When MacCollop told them that he had been shot at, a wail arose.

'Och, in troth, sor, Shamus, the poor boy, would never do the likes o' that! A

quiet, dacent boy like Shamus, that never done harm to a soul. Yer honour's made a mistake ; he never fired at ye, not he !'

But the agent, pale and furious, was in no humour to listen.

'Oot o' my way noo, every ane !' he cried, fiercely clutching his prey.

But the people hustled about him.

'Never lay a hand on the poor boy, yer honour ; him that's never once been in the barrack, nor his father before him.'

'Oot o' the way, I say !'

So saying he dragged Shamus, who seemed literally petrified with fear, up through the village to the police barrack. Once there, he handed him over to the police, saw him well secured, and went down to report the affair to Mr O'Brien.

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Naturally enough, this little affair caused a good deal of excitement in Patrickstown. Not that it was unexpected, or that the people felt the least horrified at the agent's narrow escape. In good truth they were only angry that Shamus should have been so stupid and careless as to have let his victim go free. It was a pity, they thought, since the affair had ended so, that it had ever been attempted, it would only steel the master's heart still more against the tenants and make their lot the harder.

In their conjectures they were right. When MacCollop informed his master of the event, Mr O'Brien's face grew stern, his aquiline features seemed to harden into stone, and a look of cruel determination overspread his whole countenance.

‘Oh, they mean to work in that way, do they,’ he said. ‘We will soon put a stop to that sort of thing. We must make an example of this one, and so frighten the rest. Did you say there was any one by who saw the shot fired?’

‘Weel, I am thinking there was na mony folk oot in the fields, and on my conscience I couldna swear that more than ae body saw it all!’

‘Well, one would be enough! Who was that?’

‘The vera man that you supply wi’ food, the only one that got nae summons for rent — Pat O’Connor they call him!’

‘And where was he?’

‘In the same field, about two hundred yards away!’

‘Capital! that will be quite enough; we

must secure this man as a witness when the case is tried. I'll adopt your plan now, MacCollop, and lay a heavy hand upon them. Kindness, you see, is quite thrown away !'





CHAPTER XV.

FATHER MALLOY SOWS HIS SEEDS.

NONLY a few hours after the attempt had been made on MacCollop's life, news of the circumstance reached the ears of Father Malloy. It caused the holy man some uneasiness; not so much, that is to say, the mere news of the attack, but the irritating fact of the tenant's arrest. Such a bungling amateurish performance Father Malloy, whose experience was large, had never previously known.

While his reverence was thinking over the affair, the idea suddenly entered his head

to have another personal interview with Mr O'Brien. After all he had never been forbidden the house, and if he found when he got there that his visit would do no good either to himself or to his people, he could easily twist it into a visit of condolence, which, when subsequently spoken of, would certainly operate in his reverence's favour.

He accordingly donned his best clothes, and made his appearance in Mr O'Brien's drawing-room, just half-an-hour after Mac-Collop had left. Mr O'Brien was not exactly a vindictive or suspicious man at any time, and, after all, he had no just cause of anger against the Parish Priest. He therefore received Father Malloy with cold courtesy, and spoke to him at once concerning what had taken place.

'Don't you think it a pity,' said the Priest,

after some general conversation, 'that you were not guided, in the first instance, by my advice?'

'Not in the least,' returned Mr O'Brien quietly.

'You mean then to proceed as you originally proposed?'

Mr O'Brien gazed calmly at his companion.

'Certainly,' he returned; 'when people meet me with ingratitude, as these people have done, I have no pity for them, and when it comes to open fight I like to hold my own. I begin as I mean to go on, therefore I shall punish this man and make an example of him. It is because the Roman Catholic Irish have hitherto encountered cowards only, that they have become murderers by profession. It shall not be so here!'

The Priest heaved a heavy sigh.

‘Ha! pray, have you any witnesses to call?’

‘Certainly,’ returned Mr O’Brien, who thereupon told about Patrick O’Connor, and his views with regard to him. The Priest listened quietly to every word, but as he did so he kept his face in shadow. When Mr O’Brien had finished he rose to go.

‘I suppose it is quite useless for me to offer you my advice again?’ he said, smiling.

‘Quite,’ returned Mr O’Brien; ‘if you remember we agreed not to discuss my tenants any more. It would only lead to unpleasantness between us!’

The Priest shrugged his shoulders.

‘I have tried to do my duty,’ he said; ‘I can do no more. I shall now wash my hands of the whole affair, and *whatever happens*, I cannot interfere again!’

And bowing a cold 'good-night' to Miss O'Brien, he backed out of the house. But he did not go home. For more than an hour he continued pacing abstractedly up and down the road pondering as to the next move which he must take in this intricate game.

Father Malloy was not the man to play hastily, especially when, as now, there was a great stake at issue. Whatever he did must be done secretly and surely, with a view to backing up the people's cause, and damaging that of O'Brien the interloper.

After his reflections were over, he walked on very quickly, and curiously enough, in the direction of Patrick O'Connor's hut. It was growing late by this time, and on arriving at the door he found that the whole family were gone to bed. However,

on hearing the Priest's voice, Patrick got up and opened the door. The Priest entered, closed the door, and while Patrick yawning and half asleep, pulled together the few smouldering sods of turf, sat down near the hearth.

'These are queer things that are going about, Pat,' said the Priest.

'Quare enough, yer riv'rence,' replied the man.

'Do you know, Pat, that you are to go to Castleflynn to swear against poor Shamus?'

'I didn't hear that, yer riv'rence!'

'Ah!'

There was a pause, then the Priest spoke again.

'They want you to swear away his life!'

'Faith, yer riv'rence, I couldn't do that!' returned Patrick, aghast.

'Of course you couldn't,' said the Priest, quietly catching him up; 'I told Mr O'Brien that you couldn't have heard any firing, and that you never would say you did!'

'I heard some kind o' a little shmall noise,' said Patrick, scratching his head and hesitating.

Father Malloy caught him up again.

'But surely it wasn't the sound of a gun being let off that you heard. Surely that's impossible!—and yet they want to say that you saw the agent's hat blown off his head by the shot! Come, speak freely! Is it possible that you even remember whether or no he had a hat on at all, when he was speaking to you? Come, tell me.'

‘I don’t think I could, yer riv’rence!’

The Priest patted Patrick on the arm.

‘By-the-bye, come up to my house to-morrow, Patrick, and you shall have a pair of my boots, almost as good as new, and an old coat I’ve got. You can’t go to town as you are! Well,’ continued the priest, rising, ‘I am very glad they are going to call you, Patrick, and not another, for you were always to be trusted. I knew right well that you would never swear your neighbour’s life away, or do him the least harm in the world.’

‘In troth, yer riv’rence,’ said Patrick earnestly, and with tears in his eyes, ‘I never would.’

‘Well, well, I wonder how this will all end? Mr. O’Brien is a strange man, he actually talks of turning you all out, but

if poor Shamus gets off he wont dare to do anything of the sort!'

With these words the Priest shook hands with Patrick and departed. After he was gone, Patrick pondered for a while and then fell asleep.





CHAPTER XVI.

AND THE SEEDS SPRING.

ALTHOUGH the prisoner was without ceremony at once conveyed to the county gaol, many weeks had to elapse before he could be tried. Meantime Mr O'Brien set to work to prepare for the trial. At first he was rather apprehensive as to the conduct of the peasantry, fearing that during the interval some attack might be made upon himself, and so effectually prevent his carrying on the prosecution. But he soon saw that

his fears were unfounded. Day after day passed away in perfect peace, and, in fact, during the whole of the law's delay the conduct of the people was in every way blameless.

At the end of some weeks therefore Mr O'Brien had gained confidence. 'The people are evidently getting afraid,' he said to himself. 'Once the man is in prison my future success is assured.' With no doubt whatever that he would be able to procure the conviction of Shamus Moor, he went into Castlelynn with a light heart.

By ten o'clock on the morning of the trial the court house was crammed. Numbers of the Patrickstown tenantry were there, and in the midst of them was their guide, philosopher, and friend, the Rev. Father Malloy. There sat the judge upon

his bench, and in the well below him, his red fat face shining like a peony amidst the barristers' wigs, was our old friend Mr O'Flaherty, of Blarneytown. It soon transpired that Mr O'Flaherty had been retained for the prisoner. He therefore returned Mr O'Brien's look of recognition with a cataleptic stare, and after snorting like an overrun horse, dived into his box of parchment deeds.

Shortly after ten o'clock the prisoner Shamus Moor was conducted into court, and the case began.

The counsel for the prosecution opened the case, and after winding up his speech by saying that he should put upon the witness table the gentleman who had been fired at, and one witness who saw the outrage committed, he called Mr

MacCollop, who was examined and cross-examined forthwith.

Save that once or twice, being worked up to frenzy by the impertinence of the cross-questions, MacCollop broke into expressions of rage, his evidence passed quietly enough.

It was the appearance of the next witness which was looked forward to by certain spectators in the court with an anxiety almost amounting to dread. Accordingly when MacCollop left the table and the next witness was called, the silence was profound. Amidst this silence Patrick O'Connor entered the court with his shambling awkward gait, gave one glance around, and then with a sigh of relief hung his head. In that one glance his eyes had met those of Father Maloy, and the last conversation which he had

had with the Priest at once recurred to his mind.

His gaunt cheeks were pale as death when he stepped upon the witness table, and being duly sworn, awaited the result,

There was not a movement in the court. Patrick felt that the Priest's eyes were fixed upon him, and this seemed to inspire him with courage to proceed. After a few unimportant questions, which he answered innocently and straightforwardly enough, he was asked suddenly,—

‘Where were you standing when you heard the shot?’

Patrick—What shot, yer honour?

Counsel—Why, the one fired by the prisoner.

Patrick—By Shamus, is it? Troth, I don't know, sor!

Counsel—Come, no prevarication. . . .
You heard the shot ?

Patrick (desperately)—I did not, thin.
I niver in the whole course o' my life
heard a shot out of a gun !

The counsel started, so did the judge,
so did Mr O'Brien and MacCollop, but
the jury looked relieved. In imagination
Patrick felt the Priest pat him on the
shoulder ; he saw Shamus raise his head
and look gratefully at him, and he felt
pleased.

The examination was continued.

Counsel—What were you doing on the
Tuesday morning when Mr MacCollop came
to speak about the rent ?

Patrick—Digging up a few pratics.

Counsel—And what did you do after he
turned and left you ?

Patrick—Just went on digging.

Counsel—And what made you turn round ?

Patrick (after a long pause)—A kind of a little noise I heard.

Counsel—You said just now that you heard no noise !

Patrick looked staggered at this, but he quickly pulled himself together and replied.

Patrick—I did *not*, yer honour. I said I niver heard a shot out o' a gun !

Counsel—*This* was a shot out of a gun.

Patrick—It was *not*, yer honour.

Counsel—What was it, then ?

Patrick—In troth I don't know.

Counsel—What did it sound like ?

Patrick—Like a kind of a little shmall sound.

Counsel—I know that. What did you think it was ?

Patrick—I thought, indeed, that maybe the cow, poor beast, had got into the corn.

Counsel (*sarcastically*)—And you were going to look after her, I suppose ?

Patrick (*very innocently*)—I was indeed, sor !

Here a titter at the counsel's expense went through the court. He turned red as fire, and for a moment entirely lost his self-control.

‘You may go down, sir,’ he said, fixing his angry eyes upon the witness, and then, when he had recovered himself, he addressed the judge.

‘My lord,’ he said, ‘it is, I think, quite unnecessary to comment upon the evidence of this witness. No one can fail to per-

ceive that he has been telling a tissue of falsehoods !'

Of course everybody, including the judge, felt that the irate counsel was right, but what could they say or do ? If this was the only witness the prosecution could produce, why the case was nowhere !

Another attempt was made, partly by the judge, but Patrick looked so innocent, and remained so firm, that nothing could be got from him. The most they could do was to make him contradict himself again and again, but even then he would admit nothing against the prisoner. At last he was dismissed.

In due time the judge addressed the jury. He said that the case upon which they had to decide was a most grave one. Agrarian outrages were becoming so common in Ireland, that unless they were

put a stop to, most serious consequences would certainly ensue. Things had assumed a very dark look indeed, when a crime of so violent a nature could take place in broad day in a thickly-populated village like Patrickstown. Mr MacCollop had given his evidence in a straightforward manner, but he could not say as much for the last witness, who was either hopelessly stupid or utterly mendacious; it would be for the jury to decide which.

Thereupon the jury retired. After an absence of only five minutes they returned with their verdict.

‘Not guilty!’

Judge—Is that your unanimous verdict?

Foreman—It is, my lord.

The judge shrugged his shoulders.

‘Release the prisoner,’ he said; adding,
‘so long as witnesses will not come forward

nor juries convict, there will be no justice and no peace in Ireland.'

And so Shamus Moor left the court a free man ; a man whom all present knew to be guilty, but whom none dared to convict and few to condemn.





CHAPTER XVII.

NO QUARTER.

WHEN Mr O'Brien drove his agent home to Patrickstown that night, it was considerably past twelve o'clock. Yet the villagers were still in wild commotion. Two huge bonfires burnt on the cross roads, and lights flashed from cabins lying black upon the blackened hills, while voices filled the air with wild rejoicing.

‘Oh, I am so glad you have come, papa,’ said Kate, rushing into her father’s arms. ‘Since that man returned the people seem

to have gone mad, and I was quite afraid they might come here. Owen advised me to have the iron doors and shutters closed, for he says that the people are so incensed against us, it will be more dangerous than ever for us to remain.'

'Tush, tush, Kate, my girl,' said Mr O'Brien, 'don't show the white feather. 'Tis the very way to urge the scoundrels on.'

'But you will not stay, papa?'

'Indeed, my dear, I am not to be intimidated;,' and then, seeing an anxious look overspread his daughter's face, he added, 'there, there, my dear, you get to bed. You have sat up too late already, and made yourself nervous. Get away to sleep now, and we will talk these matters over to-morrow.'

When he had thus summarily disposed

of his daughter, Mr O'Brien sat down in his study to think over the events of the day. He mentally reviewed the trial, he heard Patrick's cunning and mendacious evidence, he saw the would-be murderer walk jauntily out of court. The subsequent hustling and jostling and hissing which the sight of his face had caused in the Town Hall, showed him only too plainly the way that public opinion blew. He knew that although he had come there with the most generous intentions that a man could have, he had unwittingly, and by his very acts of generosity, raised a perfect hornets' nest about him. He knew too that there were now only two courses left for him to adopt. The one was to acknowledge himself a coward and fly, the other was to stay, assert his strength, and at any cost, let these people feel that he was master.

The latter was the only course his pride permitted him to pursue.

Few men are born angels, and Mr O'Brien was by no means one of the few. He could not forgive his enemies seventy times seven. When he received an injury he liked to pay it back. He was a kind and generous friend, a stern and implacable enemy. He believed that his short residence amongst these people had shown him exactly what they were,—a deceitful and ungenerous race, cringing to power, but tyrannical when power was given to them. The speeches of Father Malloy were even beginning to influence him; small wonder then that they influenced the poor benighted creatures who weighed and revered his every word.

Having reviewed the past, he began to think over the future.

He knew very well that what had occurred would render his living in Patrickstown a good deal more perilous than it had been before. The acquittal of Shamus Moor would give the people courage, especially as it proved that whatever atrocious acts might be committed, no witnesses could be got to swear. There lay the root of all the evil! A man might (and may, in Ireland) shoot down another in broad daylight with twenty people looking on, yet they would one and all stare steadfastly in the questioner's face and swear that they saw nothing. So long as neither evidence could be got nor convictions made, crime would still run rife.

Nevertheless, with all this patent to his intelligence, Mr O'Brien determined to remain.

But although he was determined himself

to fight to the bitter end, he by no means wished to involve his agent in peril; so when MacCollop called in the morning, he offered to release him from his engagement if he chose to go.

But MacCollop quietly refused.

‘I’m no sae great a cooard as they tak’ me for, Mr O’Brien,’ he said. ‘If ye’ll gang yoursel’, I’ll gang too, but on nae other conditions. And noo, what about the rent?’

‘Realise it if they won’t pay,’ said Mr O’Brien decidedly.

‘Oh, papa,’ faltered Kate, ‘do not be too hard upon the poor creatures.’

‘Do you call that hard, Kate, to take what is my own?’

‘But they are so very poor,’ urged the trembling girl.

‘From the specimens I have had of



their veracity, Kate, I begin to think they're not so poor as they make out. At all events they merit no further forbearance from me.'

'But you forget, papa, you are making them all suffer for the faults of one man!'

'I consider them all culpable. Didn't they rejoice when the wretch got off, and didn't the very man whom I have saved from starvation, stand in the court and swear to a tissue of lies, in order to defeat me, and release the wretch who had attempted murder? Don't preach kindness and consideration to me again, Kate. I have done with them for ever.'

The girl said no more, but a strange foreboding crept about her heart, which seemed to herald the troubles that were to come.





CHAPTER XVIII.

PATRICK TRIES IN VAIN TO SERVE TWO
MASTERS.

IN the Saturday which wound up this eventful week, Patrick O'Connor, in the sublimity of his innocence, went up to Cradgduff House as usual to receive his weekly allowance.

Since that day, just two days ago, when he had perjured himself so woefully in the court, he had seen nothing whatever either of Miss O'Brien or her father. What their opinion about his conduct might be he had not paused to re-

flect, since he seldom reflected on anything. He was a good deal astonished therefore, when, on arriving at Cradgduff House, he found himself suddenly and unceremoniously hustled into the presence of his master.

‘So you have come for your weekly supplies, have you?’ said Mr O’Brien, regarding him with a withering look of mingled anger and contempt.

‘I have, yer honour,’ returned Patrick stolidly.

‘And you expect, of course, that you are going to receive them?’

‘I do indeed, sor,’ returned Patrick as stolidly as before; ‘yer honour’s always good to me; long life to ye!’

Mr O’Brien looked keenly at the man, but he could read nothing in his unmoved, expressionless countenance.

‘Look here, man,’ he said impatiently; ‘let us understand one another. I have had quite enough of this hypocrisy and underhand deceit, and I’ll have no more of it. When I first came to this place I was as anxious as any man could be to give my tenants a helping hand, but I soon found that they wouldn’t let me. Although I was disheartened with others, I still believed in you, for I saw that what you did was more through ignorance and evil influence than your own will. I still believed in you, but now I begin to think that you are as bad as any of the rest!’

‘What way, yer honour?’ asked Patrick quietly.

‘No nonsense!’ explained Mr O’Brien fiercely. ‘Come, this is the last chance you’ll ever get of vindicating yourself to me. Tell me now what made you stand

in the court the other day and utter such a tissue of outrageous lies ?’

‘Is it me? Well, in troth, sor, I never told a lie in the whole course o’ my life, thank God!’

‘Why, you are telling them now, man, as certain as any man ever did! Come, don’t be afraid; I want to know who primed you for that cross-examination, for I don’t believe, I can’t think that you would have spoken so on your own responsibility.’

Patrick was silent, so Mr O’Brien continued,—

‘Did Father Malloy come and talk to you about the trial?’

‘He did, sor.’

‘Well, what did he say?’

Patrick cast a hurried glance at the face of his questioner, then hung his head.

‘In troth, sor, I cannot rightly recollect.’

Mr O’Brien slapped his hand impatiently upon the table.

‘You may go,’ he said; ‘never again come for help to me. A man so practised in lying and deceit as you are deserves no help, and will get none. Let your Priest look to you for the future, for I have done. Whenever I have found people upright and deserving of my help I have always been willing to give, but I have lost all heart in you. There, go away, and don’t let me see your face here again.’

And Patrick slunk away, rather bewildered as to what it all meant, but feeling the sharp reality of empty pockets and a cheerless home.

Thus the problem of how to live had been brought before him for the third time,

and it seemed now that he must solve it somehow. Yet how could he do so? He was a strong, hearty man himself, and he had six strong, hearty children at home who might have earned more than enough to keep the whole family in comfort, had they been in a place where work was demanded. But here there was none for them to do. Each croft had more than enough hands to till it; there was no room for outsiders, let them be who they would.

Having decided in his mind that there was no way out of the difficulty, Patrick sat down by his fireside in listless apathy, and ceased to think at all. But as each day passed the reality of his position began to impress itself upon him. Every time that he went to dig up the potatoes, they seemed to him smaller and blacker

than ever, and, although the children ate as little as could be, the food disappeared with such marvellous rapidity that Patrick saw nothing but bare starvation before him during the winter months. Patrick found his small reasoning powers quite unfitted for the demand upon them now ; so instead of thinking for himself, as any reasonable human being would have done, he went for advice where he had always been taught to seek it, from the Priest.

Since the trial Father Malloy had, for reasons which he did not care to explain even to himself, fought shy of Patrick's hut, but he was unfeignedly glad to see his parishioner at his own dwelling. He shook hands with him heartily, pulled up a comfortable chair, and composed himself to listen to the man's tale.

‘Humph,’ he said, when Patrick paused, ‘why did he refuse to give you any more help, Pat?’

‘In troth, I can’t rightly say, yer riv’rence!’

‘What did he say to you?’

‘He blasted me for spaking in the court, and he said, yer riv’rence,’ continued Patrick, whose memory, it will be observed, was wonderfully good when the Priest questioned, ‘that it would be better for me to tell himself what yer riv’rence said to me about the trial!’

‘Well, Pat, and what did you say?’ asked Father Malloy, whose jolly face had grown wonderfully dark.

‘I told him, yer riv’rence, that I couldn’t rightly recollect!’

‘That’s right, Pat,’ said the Priest, looking much relieved; ‘and now take

my advice and never go near that man's house again !'

Patrick's face fell.

'Faith, yer riv'rence,' he began, 'I've only got a few poor blighted praties left.'

'No matter, trust in God. *He* will give you food ; that man's bread would bring you nothing but harm. It was a dark day for us when he came here, Patrick ; but if you do what I tell you, I will give you some help myself, and maybe we will get the Sassenach away before he does much more harm !'

Promising implicit obedience, Patrick went off. The gnawing in his stomach and the thought of the hungry eyes of his offspring prevented him from feeling very satisfied with the issue of events. He only knew that he had obeyed the Priest before, and he

thought it only right that he should do so again.

As the door of the Priest's house closed upon Patrick, Father Malloy rose from his seat and paced the room in great agitation.

'That man is a thorn in my side,' he said to himself. 'We are working at cross purposes, and one of us must fail; but that one shall not be Father Malloy. Well, I have done my duty by warning him; he may help himself now!'

It will be seen that Father Malloy had shrewdness in his reasoning. Shamus Moor had exhibited his stupidity in shooting at the instrument who merely carried out disagreeable designs. Father Malloy fixed his attention upon the prime originator of all the evil, and waged war against Mr O'Brien himself.



CHAPTER XIX.

THE FIRST EVICTION.

ALTHOUGH Mr O'Brien was disgusted with his tenants, he by no means intended to renounce the idea of improving his estate. He therefore served the refractory, one and all, with summonses for neglect of sanitary laws, and consequently each householder turned out his cattle into sheds, which were hastily constructed for the purpose. He also pulled down and rebuilt several of the most dilapidated cabins on the estate, and embellished them with such superfluities as

chimneys and (where there were large families) extra rooms. When this was done he went in for the minor tasks of repairing ditches and walls, and bringing the land into something like order.

It was tedious work. It seemed to Mr O'Brien that it would never be done, for in truth the bad fairies were in league against him. Regularly every night malicious hands undid the work of the day before, and although strict watch was kept, the offenders could never be discovered. Several times in the twilight MacCollop had seen figures at work with a billhook and spade, but no sooner had he approached than they fled and were lost in the darkness.

One night, however, the agent came very suddenly and unexpectedly upon a busy group. It was too dark for him to see their faces, so he made a rush to seize the

nearest, and as he did so a sharp stone struck him on the side of the head, almost knocking him to the ground. When he recovered sufficiently to go on again the men had vanished.

The plot thickened.

One night, about a week after this, Mr O'Brien was making his way home. He had been detained by business matters which had called him to the other end of the estate, and when he was returning home the twilight fell close upon the heels of the declining 'day. He had walked a good distance, and was within a mile of his home when, throwing up his head and gazing meditatively before him, his eyes rested upon some figures only dimly discernible in the fading light, who were working away razing to the ground a substantial turf wall which had been

in course of erection only that very day.

Mr O'Brien paused for a moment to consider what to do. Remembering the fate of the impetuous agent, he determined to be more careful, and, if possible, wind up his adventure with better success. So he stooped silently down, produced from his pocket a loaded revolver, and holding this in his hand ready for an emergency, crept cautiously along. Thus, hidden by an angle of the wall, he came to within a few yards of the spot where the men were working. There were some six of them, sturdy giants, bare headed, bare armed, all with their backs towards him. As he could proceed no further under cover of the wall, he rose to his feet, made a dash into their midst, and seized one ruffian by the collar.

As he did so all the rest disappeared like magic, and the two were left alone.

‘You scoundrel, I have you at last!’ said Mr O’Brien; but before he could utter another word, a reaping-hook, sharp as a razor, was placed around his neck by his companion. In a moment more his head would have been severed from his body, but, fortunately for him, he had presence of mind enough to raise his revolver and press the muzzle against the ruffian’s temple.

‘*You* pull,’ he said, ‘and I fire! Let us see which will be the dead man first.’

In a moment the man cringed in fear; the reaping-hook was withdrawn, and some excuses were stammered in Irish, but Mr O’Brien kept his hold of the man’s coat.

‘Come with me,’ he said; and walking thus, both in profound silence, they proceeded to Cragduff House.

When they arrived there, Mr O'Brien despatched a message for his agent, and conducting his companion into the dining-room, and pointing to a chair, ordered him to be seated, while he himself attended to his own injuries, until such time as Mac-Collop should arrive. For he had not come off scathless. The thick muffler which he had worn had been cut through, and there was a slight wound in the back of his neck, from which the blood was issuing freely. In order not to frighten his daughter, he locked the dining-room door to prevent her entering unawares, and taking out his pocket-handkerchief he proceeded to bind up the wound to staunch the blood and keep it covered until he could dress it with more care.

The man sat in the corner watching these operations in silence. When the

blood and the cut were exposed his eyes gleamed with a savage sort of delight. The moment Mr O'Brien turned his face towards him he hung his head and scowled as sullenly as before.

Presently the voice of the agent was heard in the hall, and Mr O'Brien, unlocking the door, admitted him. After a hurried explanation of what had taken place, Mr O'Brien took his seat at the table, pulled towards him a sheet of paper and an inkstand, and looked fixedly at the man, who still sat doggedly silent.

'Now,' he said coolly, 'tell me the names of the men who were helping you to pull down that ditch'?

'Troth, yer honour, 'twas not myself that was doing that same.'

'Do not take the trouble to lie,' said Mr O'Brien sternly. 'I happened to see

you at work. Now, just tell me the names of your companions and you go free, otherwise you will be in the gaoler's hands before a week is over your head !'

The man was silent.

'Come,' said Mr O'Brien, 'I can't waste all my evening. Are you going to tell me their names?'

'I am *not* !' was the brusque reply.

Mr O'Brien looked at him with cool unconcern.

'You had better reflect,' he said; 'I don't want to press my offers upon you, but you have just attempted my life, and if you don't tell me what I want to know, you won't see Patrickstown again, at least while *I* am master here.'

The man muttered an oath beneath his breath.

'Softly, softly,' said Mr O'Brien, 'cursing will not avail you, nor will it intimidate me. Once more, for the last time, do you mean to tell me?'

'I do not!'

'Very well, there's an end of the matter. MacCollop,' he added, as he went over to unlock the door, 'we won't trouble the police in the matter. Have the goodness to see that this man's goods are sold up, and that he is safely out of Patrickstown before the week is done!'

'Nae doot o' that,' said the agent, 'a deal of good it would dae to the place if all sic vermin were sent awa!'

Without a word, and with his glittering eyes fixed upon the ground, the man passed out of the house. When he reached the open air he turned and cursed the house and its inmates to his heart's content.

Having satisfied himself in this manner, he walked hastily away towards the cluster of huts upon the hill.

Entering one of these, where a number of people were collected, he sat down amongst them, and told his story amidst great excitement, and many ejaculations against Mr O'Brien. The man was praised lavishly for his discretion in keeping dark the names of his companions, and when he spoke of his own threatened departure, he was consoled with the information that Mr O'Brien would not be long out of a certain nameless place, and that once he was safe there the poor oppressed Irishman might come back to his native village.

It must not be supposed that an idea of setting authority at defiance, and forcibly retaining possession of the

land, did not come into the man's mind. It passed through his brain almost at first, but after a brief consultation with Father Malloy the project was abandoned as hopeless, and the man yielded with quiet submission to his fate.

Before the week was out his cow and pig and various household articles were taken and sold by auction. Mr O'Brien, besides giving him his year's rent, sent a few pounds in hard cash, and amidst a sympathetic howl from the inhabitants of Patrickstown, he and his family departed for the States. The night before the departure Father Malloy went down to the man's hut and gave him his blessing, and smiling in his kindly, jovial manner, held out hopes of a speedy return, when brighter times came to the land. What the good Priest meant he

did not exactly explain, but the man listening, felt that he had promised in a vague way to dispose, sooner or later, of Mr O'Brien.

Father Malloy made good capital out of this eviction. He shook his head gravely, shrugged his shoulders, and told his people it was only what they might expect since a Protestant held possession of the land, which by right should fall to the poor Catholics' share. In deprecation of the cowardly murderous attack which had been made upon the landlord he said nothing; but having sown his black seeds cunningly, yet with a liberal hand, he left them to ripen, and quietly watched for the result.





CHAPTER XX.

PATRICK IS OBSTINATE.

MEANWHILE MacCollop, acting upon his master's orders, had made a second application for the year's rent. Touched by the howl of agony which met this demand, he had offered to take a moiety of the sum due, but even this was not forthcoming. Wishing to make a public example, and perhaps guided in his choice by some lingering wish for revenge, he drove Shamus Moor's two fat heifers into the fair, and realised the sum owed by that individual. Having

done this, MacCollop felt somewhat easier in his mind, and paused to reflect how he had best proceed with the rest of the tenantry.

That they were quite as poor as they pretended to be, he could not credit. A long residence in Ireland had taught him to use his own eyes, and draw his own conclusions, rather than believe one word of what he heard. He was undecided, therefore, what to do, when Father Flannigan, whose orgies of late had overrun all decent bounds, ran short of petty cash, and took it into his head to make his yearly collection.

Now this collection was of course an entirely voluntary contribution to the Priest from the people. Had the tenants proved refractory, and refused to pay, Father Flannigan could not have forced them to

deliver up a single penny. He trusted solely to their good nature in the matter; and the result went to prove that his trust was not misplaced.

The Curate made his rounds; he called at houses where it would seem to a casual observer that famine and filth dwelt side by side, where the children shivered in rags and men and women appeared like gaunt staring spectres—houses into which MacCollop had looked in despair, believing that if he brought the full power of the law to bear upon them, he would only realise a few pence. Yet, strange to say, silver coins were now produced and handed over, sometimes, it is true, rather grudgingly, to the Curate. From some families he got three shillings—he never went lower than two—and in one or more instances the donation amounted to five.

When the collection was over, the Curate had realised fifty pounds in cash.

Directly the news of this event reached his ears, the agent swelled out with uncontrollable rage. He felt that he had been duped. The very people who, with tears in their eyes, had sworn to him that they did not possess a fraction in the world, had produced their contribution for the Curate. He was wildly incensed; and being so, he did not pause to reflect upon the justice of his actions.

He did not reflect, for example, that people so superstitious as were those who came beneath his rule would starve themselves and their children rather than incur the displeasure of such a man as Father Flannigan by not having a donation for him. He did not argue that having given their little all they were penniless; he thought only

of the round unvarnished lies which had been *his* mead; he reflected that when he had sunk his demands to the lowest iota, the total sum demanded had been something under thirty pounds, while the Curate, who had asked for money which must be given gratuitously, had realised no less than fifty!

Determined not to be hoodwinked for nothing, and acting upon the summonses which had been already issued, MacCollop seized from every house live stock enough to realise one-half of the year's rent, consenting with reluctance to let the other stay until the potatoes should come in again. But when he came to poor Patrick's hut his operations suddenly ceased, for here grim poverty met him in its direst form.

The half-dozen hens, which had once

been plump enough, were now worn down to handfuls of skin and bone ; the children, already looking pale and wasted from want of sufficient food, crouched in despair upon the floor. In answer to the agent's demand for money, the haggard father pointed through the open door to a small ridge of blighted potatoes as his sole stay for the long weary winter months.

After taking a survey of the place, and ascertaining the whole state of things, MacCollop went straight to Mr O'Brien, told him what he had done, and, as he thought, put in a word for poor Patrick, viz., that as starvation was approaching upon him and his with such rapid strides, and as if he remained in Patrickstown he would be found some fine morning starved to death beside his fire, some one should play the good Samaritan and advance him

money to take himself and his family to America, where they would be certain to find work and do well.

After a little hesitation, Mr O'Brien yielded to the persuasions of his daughter and his agent, and consented to see the man and talk the matter over with him. Accordingly, an hour or so later, Patrick again entered the room where Mr O'Brien and his daughter were sitting, and stood pulling at the fringe of his ragged coat and shuffling about his feet, like a man waiting to hear his doom.

The truth is, neither of these men approached the other in a proper spirit. No sooner did the ragged figure appear than Mr O'Brien recalled the scene in court, and felt, before the wretched creature opened his lips, that he could not rely upon one word that he might say. Patrick's

thoughts, on the other hand, reverted to all that the good Priest had said, and as he looked at the cold, calm face of his landlord he felt that he stood before the very worst enemy that he had in the world.

‘Well,’ said Mr O’Brien, ‘how have you been getting on since you were here last?’

Patrick—Badly enough, yer honour!

Mr O’Brien—Have you thought of any means of supporting your family until the potatoes come in again?

Patrick—I have *not*, thin!

O’Brien—More shame for you to say so; you know, don’t you, that you have to pass through six or eight months at least before you can possibly add to your stock of food.

Patrick—I do indeed, sor!

O’Brien—And how did you propose to live in the meantime?

Patrick—In troth, yer honour, I don't know! I thought maybe that yer honour would give me some charity for the little childher, God bless them!

O'Brien—Nonsense, I can't let you live rent free and keep you too. If all my tenants made the same demand, I should soon have nothing but the workhouse before me. Besides, I don't believe in helping people who won't help themselves. At least three of your children could do light work, could not they?

Patrick—Of course they could, sor, and myself could work too!

O'Brien—Yes, but you see there's no work to be procured here. Well, I will tell you what I will do with you. I will buy the few potatoes that you have got in your land, and advance you a sum of money that will pay the passage of yourself and

your family to America, and leave you something over when you get there. It is a capital year for emigrants; you would get work in no time, and perhaps save money enough to visit Ireland again before long.

When Mr O'Brien made this offer, he thought he was doing something handsome. What was his astonishment, therefore, to see the man dart a dark agonised look into his face and flatly refuse!

Mr O'Brien—Do you actually mean to tell me that you refuse to go?

Patrick—I do indeed, sor!

Kate—But remember you would be able to work and keep your poor children there, whereas, if you remain here, you will surely starve. You cannot expect papa to help you if you will not do something for yourself.

Patrick (simply)—That's true enough, miss !

Kate—I thought you would see the justice of it. You will go then ?

Patrick—I will *not*, miss ; please God !

Poor Patrick ! the seed which the Priest had cast his way had not fallen on barren soil.

He believed, as honestly as any man could believe, that ever since Mr O'Brien had set foot in Patrickstown he had been plotting to turn him and his family out into foreign parts, and thus strip him of his only possessions, the little bit of land which had kept life in his body from year to year, the house where his children had been born, where his wife had died, and where he had hoped to die also, to tear him away from his Priest, his kindred people, the only associations which he had

ever known or ever cared to know. Though God knows Patrick was as low in his instincts as it is possible for a human being to be, he had reigning paramount in his breast a strong sentiment of patriotic love. Had he been told that he must die in the little tumble-down hut and receive the good Priest's blessing, and lie beneath the wild rocks and stones in the graveyard by the sea, he would have been tolerably well content, for indeed he was tired out. But the thought of being turned away to end his days in a foreign land was what he could not and would not endure. And yet when Miss O'Brien, in her soft persuasive way, asked him for an explanation he could give none. He could only shake his head and repeat what he had said before,—that 'plaise God' he would not stir.

'You prefer to remain here and starve then?' said Mr O'Brien severely.

He could not see into the man's mind. He judged by his actions, and condemned him accordingly.

'How do you propose to pay me my rent?' he added.

Patrick—In troth, sor, I don't know.

O'Brien—Well, you had better think of it. If you can't pay you must give up the land,—that's all.

'Would yer honour turn me out?' asked Patrick, in a voice of low suppressed passion, while his hand involuntarily clenched, his teeth set.

Mr O'Brien noted both actions.

'I don't know what I might be tempted to do,' he said. 'One thing is certain, no amount of intimidation will make me harbour a horde of starving beggars on my land.'

Patrick bowed good-night, and backed out.

‘Depend upon it, Kate,’ said Mr O’Brien, when he had disappeared, ‘there’s no good in that fellow. A low, skulking vagabond, that would sooner see his children starve than work for them. If he thinks I am going to encourage his laziness he is terribly mistaken. It’s the last offer of help he’ll ever get from me.’





CHAPTER XXI.

SKIRMISHING.

WHEN Patrick had appeared in Mr O'Brien's drawing-room, Miss O'Brien, seated beside a small table, which held the lamp, had held in her hand an open book, from which she had been preparing to read aloud. When the man had gone she reverted to the page and commenced the task, in order to avoid the discussion upon which she dreaded to enter.

It was pitch dark outside; the curtains were drawn across the windows, but the

shutters were not closed; and as Mr O'Brien paced thoughtfully up and down the room, thinking more of the man who had just left him than of what his daughter read, his shadow was thrown at full length on the window-blind, drawn and contorted, but plainly showing it was his.

Kate had been reading for some ten minutes; her father had been pacing the room in silence for the same length of time, when suddenly there was a frightful crash, and a huge piece of sharp flint came smashing through the window, and flying across the room entered the front of the piano, crushing the woodwork, and tearing the silk into fragments.

Mr O'Brien started; Kate gave a cry, dropped her book, and leapt to her feet in terror. Ere she could speak a word, however, a second missile flew into the

room, and fell with a crash at Mr O'Brien's very feet.

'Keep away from the window, Kate,' cried Mr O'Brien; then ringing the bell and summoning a servant, he added, 'Owen, close the shutters, quick!'

While his orders were being executed, he seized a loaded revolver from its case and went towards the door.

'Papa,' cried Kate, 'for heaven's sake don't open the door!'

Her words were unheeded, however; her father threw open the door, and, standing on the threshold, pointed his revolver at a figure which he saw, or seemed to see, crouching upon the gravel not far from the window-sill.

'Come forward, whoever you are, or I shall fire,' he said.

In reply another huge piece of rock

flew through the air, and before he could fire or stir, struck him to the ground.

With a shriek of terror, Kate flew to his assistance, and seizing him by the arm, dragged him into the house, while Owen slammed to the iron door, and fastened every bolt and lock which it possessed. At that moment Mr O'Brien, who had been only stunned for a second, sprang to his feet with alacrity, and made again for the door, but Kate clung to his arm.

'Papa, for heaven's sake do not open the door again ; they will surely kill you.'

'But I must find out who the ruffian is, Kate. Do you think I'm going to submit quietly to this?'

'It's better for ye, sor,' said Owen quietly. 'If the divils be outside they'll kill ye before ye catch them, for bedad they've got yer honour's pistol that ye let fall ; and if they're

off, good luck to ye, but ye'll nivir ketch them.'

A moment's reflection told Mr O'Brien that this was logical reasoning enough, so he submitted to the less heroic but more prudent course, and allowed his windows and doors to remain well secured till morning.

When Mr O'Brien examined his premises next day, he found that beyond a few broken panes of glass, and a broken piano, there were no signs of the recent violence, and, worst of all, there was no ghost of a chance of discovering who the perpetrator of this violence could be. In his own mind, Mr O'Brien had little doubt as to the criminal, but as his suspicions were quite unverifiable, nothing could be done. He took the only course open to him, and offered a reward for the apprehension of the guilty party, or

parties, unknown. As he had anticipated, this move was quite unsuccessful. Nobody knew anything about the matter; everybody was astonished to hear of it, it was clear that the person or persons would never be caught. So Mr O'Brien taxed the village, and realised a trifling sum for malicious damage. At the same time he sent a message to Patrick O'Connor, informing him, that unless he could find it convenient to leave Patrickstown of his own free will, he would be turned out for the non-payment of his rent.





CHAPTER XXII.

THE PRIEST IN ABSOLUTION.

THE last day of autumn had gone to join the departed summer day ; and the first winter morning was ushered in with a nipping wind and a red angry sky. The small crops of the Patricks-town tenants had been gathered in long ago, and the empty fields lay chill and cheerless beneath the chill and cheerless sky. The first black frost had nipped the land.

Sitting in his quiet parlour, in his great arm-chair of state, Father Malloy gazed out upon the wintry scene—warming his hands

as he did so, over the turf fire which burnt so pleasantly upon his hearth. The Priest wore his broad ribbon of office, for it was the first day of the winter confessional, and he was awaiting the appearance of the penitents who were to pour their secrets into his ear.

Out in the kitchen they gathered, poor, wretched half-starved creatures, with the light of famine upon their faces, the chilly touch of winter upon their half-naked, half-frozen limbs. There they huddled waiting, while in the room beyond sat the great man of God, who held the reins of their destiny in his strong hands—God help them! and welcoming them one by one to his presence, wormed all their secrets from them, and gave his advice in return.

It is not our purpose to follow each penitent into the chamber of absolution—let the

secrets of the chamber remain sacred until we follow the footsteps of one man, who, after all the rest had come and gone, crept from the dark corner of the kitchen and entered the sacred chamber alone. A great gaunt figure ; none other indeed than poor Patrick O'Connor himself.

His shivering body was clad in the wretchedest rags, his teeth were chattering in his head with cold, his feet and head were bare, and the old shirt and trousers which covered his body were almost in shreds, exposing his naked flesh beneath ; while his sunken cheeks and wild-roving eyes attested only too plainly the hardships which he had endured. And yet as he fell at the feet of the Priest, his first words were these :—

‘ Oh, yer riv’rence, I’m in dread the master will turn us out entirely ; me and

the little childher and all. God help us!
God help us !'

The Priest's hand rested kindly upon Patrick's head, and the Priest's gentle voice spoke softly, and bade the poor creature tell him all his trials and troubles. Thus, after the Priest had said a short prayer, Patrick opened his heart to him and told him all, including of course the interviews with Mr O'Brien and that gentleman's cross-questioning. With his face growing darker and darker, the Priest listened until the end.

'Humph,' he said at length, and as if communing with himself; 'you have had a hard time of it, my poor fellow, and all through this man. Patrick!' he proceeded after a solemn pause, 'it is my duty to ask you a solemn question—is your mind ever filled with revengeful thoughts?'

Patrick reflected for a moment before he replied.

‘In troth, yer riv’rence, I can’t rightly say.’

‘Does it ever strike you, for instance,’ said the Priest impressively, ‘that it would be right and just to put an end to a man whom you know to be so completely your enemy?’

Patrick stared aghast.

‘Faith, yer riv’rence, it never did!’

A slight shadow flashed across the Priest’s face; was it anger or disappointment? It had passed away before spoke again.

‘Are you quite sure, Patrick,’ he continued impressively, ‘that it never occurred to you that it would be justifiable to kill one man, if by doing so you could relieve your fellow-townsmen from a tyrant, and keep your own family from starvation—perhaps from death?’

‘I am quite sure, yer riv’rence,’ said Patrick innocently and honestly, ‘that it never did!’

‘Very good; and even when this wretch threatened to turn you out and refused to give you bread, did it not cross your mind that if he were disposed of better times would come for you? Now answer honestly—have no secrets from *me*!’

Poor Patrick opened his eyes still wider than before.

‘It did not, yer riv’rence, never, thank God!’

‘That is well, Patrick,’ said the priest approvingly; ‘by all means keep from such thoughts as those!’

‘Plaise God, yer riv’rence, I always will!’

‘For though they are natural under the circumstances, and although the Church has

forgiveness and absolution for every sin of the sort,' continued the Priest, 'they are, to a certain extent, sins against the good God, and should not enter a man's mind.'

'No indeed, yer riv'rence, thank God Almighty I niver thought of them things in the whole coorse of my life.'

After some more unimportant questions, with which we have no concern, and after Patrick had been absolved for his few trifling peccadillos, the good Priest stretched forth his hands and blessed him, and he crept away to his cold and desolate home.

When Patrick's family were in bed that night, and he was sitting by the fire alone, his thoughts naturally reverted to the scene which had taken place between the Priest and himself that day. He began to wonder

for the first time why the Priest had asked him such questions, and following close upon the heels of these reflections came others, which until that day had never, in the most remote manner, entered his poor benighted mind. Yet, now that the thought had once penetrated into his dull intelligence, Patrick looked at the pale, pinched faces of his sleeping children, felt his own emaciated limbs, thought of the long, weary winter months before him, of the summons with which he had been threatened, and which would rob him of even his present wretched abode, and wondered for the first time whether it would be just for him to put an end to the man who had brought all this misery upon him? But the thought being new to him, seemed to thrill his soul with horror. He crept into bed like a blood-stained, guilty thing, and, drawing his rags about him,

closed his eyes and prayed to God, trying in vain to quell the thoughts which were troubling and torturing his weary, bewildered brain.





CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CARDINALS.

ON the day succeeding that on which he had given absolution to his people, Father Malloy, in obedience to the commands of his Bishop, set out to attend the yearly congress of priests, which was held at the episcopal residence in Ballyferry.

On arriving at the great house, Father Malloy was shown into a private room, and about five minutes after his arrival the room door opened and the Bishop himself appeared. After he had shaken hands cor-

dially with his guest and given him welcome, the Bishop asked how things were progressing down west.

He added, 'I fear I must call you to account, Father Malloy, unless you can explain certain matters which have lately come indirectly to my knowledge again. Read this, and then we will discuss the matter.'

So saying he produced, and Father Malloy read with many angry exclamations, the following letter :—

'MY LORD BISHOP,—Again I beg to call your attention to the reprehensible conduct of the Curate of this parish. I am now convinced that the man is a confirmed drunkard. Even since your lordship came and made inquiries about the man his conduct has been such as to disgrace the Church to which he

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belongs. Thrice during the past month I have been forced to interfere and have him confined in the barrack, and twice during the past week the scenes which he created in the village were degrading to witness. I must therefore beg your lordship to have the man removed at once, otherwise I shall be compelled to adopt other means to gain that end.—I am, your obedient servant,

‘T. O’BRIEN.’

When he had finished reading this letter, the Priest folded it and handed it respectfully back to his superior.

‘That gentleman is a thorn in my side,’ he said. ‘This is not the only matter on which we disagree. He has been endeavouring to send the children of my parishioners to Protestant schools!’

‘But you are Parish Priest there,’ the

Bishop quickly interposed ; ' you have surely never allowed it ? '

' I did *not*, my lord,' continued the Priest ;
' I anticipated your lordship's wishes, and acted accordingly. Hence this letter ! '

' Ah, I see ! But what about Flannigan ; has he been misconducting himself again ? Remember I was, as this gentleman says, summoned to him not long ago. He must not be allowed to do us discredit.'

' My lord, I agree with you entirely,' said the Priest, in his quietest and blindest manner. ' If you will allow me, I will explain the case.'

He then proceeded to give a full and particular account, extenuating nothing of Father Flannigan's proceedings since the inquiry, adding,—

' I really think, my lord, it would be advisable to remove the man from the

country altogether. A few weeks ago I should not have counselled such a proceeding, for the man has gained influence in the village, and I should have feared a riotous rising of the people.'

'And you think they'll take it quietly now?'

'By no means. I am almost convinced that if a hint as to the Curate's removal were bruited about, there would be great commotion.'

'Well, and how is the difficulty to be overcome?'

'Only one way, my lord,' said the Priest, keenly watching the face of his superior. 'Take care to let the people know that in removing the Curate you are acting upon the advice of Mr O'Brien, the proprietor of Patricks-town.'

The Bishop smiled.

‘There is some shrewdness in that remark,’ he returned. ‘Malloy, my dear fellow, you are invaluable to me. If I have any influence you will some day receive your reward!’

‘Indeed, my lord, I have ever tried to do my duty.’

‘And I must say that you have done it admirably. Why, during all the years that you have been in Patrickstown, I haven’t had a moment’s uneasiness from the place except through that rascal Flannigan. Well, well, we’ll see what can be done for you.’

Bidding his satellite follow him, the Bishop led the way into another room, which was full of black coats and long, thin, pale faces. Priests galore! from the great cathedral and the churches of Bally-

ferry, and from numerous districts around, most of them with bloodless hands and taper fingers,—some plainly clad, others more showily, and a few liberally besprinkled with fragrant perfumes, and decorated with such ornaments as the Church allowed ; but most of them with faces characteristic of the tribe,—the sunken cheeks, lantern jaws, cat-like eyes, and, worst of all, the oily tongue.

In the presence of these worthies the Bishop appointed the Rev. Father Malloy, of Patrickstown, Holy Father Confessor for that day. After this slight ceremony was over, Father Malloy saluted his brethren in his usual hearty manner, and sat down to dine at the Bishop's right hand.

These honours being bestowed upon a Priest of so remote a village as Patricks-

town, did not fail to call up many jealous frowns upon the faces of the company ; but before the bland, hearty manner of Father Malloy, these frowns soon disappeared, and hilarity and good fellowship were quickly restored amongst the company.

During that evening Father Malloy received the confessions of his brethren, including that of the Bishop himself. After this duty was satisfactorily performed, the Priests gradually departed, but Father Malloy remained behind. After all the company were gone, the Bishop and Priest retired to the study alone.

‘ Malloy, I want you to go to Dublin to-morrow,’ said the Bishop abruptly.

‘ Indeed, my lord !’

‘ Yes ; Cardinals C— and M— are there.

They want some account of how we are doing down west, and I think you are the best man to give it.'

'I am proud of the honour.'

'You will give them a satisfactory account of the way things are going.'

'To the best of my power I will endeavour to fulfil satisfactorily the duties which your lordship has imposed upon me.'

'Very good. Here is your letter of introduction. I have told them that they may rely implicitly upon what you say. I have also added a few words about you, which I hope may be of some service to you.'

'Many thanks, my lord.'

'No thanks necessary. By the way, what *would* you advise me to do about Flannigan, eh?'

‘You will act on your own judgment, my lord!’ warily replied the Priest.

‘Of course, of course; but if you were in my place, what would you do, eh?’

‘I cannot imagine that, my lord; the place is so well filled already!’

‘Ha, ha, ha! you deserve to wear the mitre, Malloy; upon my word you do!’ the pleased ecclesiastic replied.

‘I certainly think, then, with all deference to your judgment, that the man should be quietly removed!’

‘Precisely my *own* opinion, and I am glad you agree with me. We must have no public scandal, you know; it wouldn’t do!’

‘It would save us a deal of annoyance if, as I said before, your lordship would allow the onus of the removal to rest upon the landlord’s head.’

The Bishop nodded knowingly, and warmly shaking his Priest by the hand, wished him good-night and God-speed for the morrow.

Father Malloy retired to bed well-pleased with what he had done. He had, for some time, been wishing for the removal of Father Flannigan. The man's influence over the people had been increasing to such an extent as almost to dim the lustre of his own bright presence. By compassing his removal he would rid himself of an encumbrance, and by casting the onus upon the landlord he hoped that he would sooner or later free himself and his Church from a mortal enemy. The next day Father Malloy went up to Dublin to interview the cardinals.

He felt somewhat abashed at the important position in which he was placed, and

his inordinate wish to appear well in the eyes of his superiors, rendered him more nervous still. He was accordingly much relieved when at length the trial was partially over; and he found himself conversing respectfully, but with his usual fluency and easy grace, with two gentlemen—one a tall, lean individual, with a pale, pinched face worn to a skeleton, through insufficient nutrition and religious fervour—the other a short, broad man, with a rufous face and a somewhat truculent manner.

Father Malloy's report went to prove that, in his opinion, Roman Catholicism was taking a stronger hold upon the outlying districts every day, that although there had been several small attempts to storm the citadel, *i.e.*, establish the Protestant faith in the little villages, he and others had, with the help of God, retained

their influence over the people, even although by so doing they had raised a good deal of spleen in the enemy's breast.

‘And what is the meaning of this local scandal?’ asked Cardinal M—. ‘Are these reports, some of which have reached the hostile press, *true*?’

‘My lord, I cannot altogether call them false,’ returned Father Malloy gravely; ‘but with your lordship’s permission I will explain!’

And he did explain. He said that, unfortunately for him, a young man who had a *slight inclination* for intoxicating liquors, had been sent down as Curate of Patricks-town; that for a short time he had, unknown to himself, been indulging in liquor, that on the fact becoming known he (Father Malloy) had reported to the Bishop, whereupon that worthy had at once expressed

his intention of removing the man to the States! Father Malloy then proceeded to say that he had for some time been employed in collecting funds for the erection of a school in his own parish; but that the district was a poor one and his progress slow. He had, however, on two occasions, felt it his duty to stop the erection of a school-house which had been twice commenced, and which was intended to be under Protestant superintendence.

‘And you did well,’ said Cardinal C— approvingly; ‘the school, when it is erected, must of course be under Roman Catholic rule!’

‘I am proud to win your lordship’s approbation.’

‘I have good reports of you,’ the Cardinal continued. ‘We must see if we cannot reward you as you deserve.’

The delighted Priest bowed again, and after a little made his adieu. His visit had been satisfactory in every way; but he was glad it was over, and he could now turn his thoughts towards home.





CHAPTER XXIV.

THE NIGHT ATTACK.

THE first act of Father Malloy, when he was again comfortably settled in his home, was to write a formal note to Mr O'Brien, informing that gentleman that the Bishop, acting upon his (Mr O'Brien's) advice, was about to remove the Rev. Father Flannigan from the village of Patrickstown; and on the following Sunday morning, after he had read mass, he made the same announcement from the altar of his chapel, taking particular care to lay the

necessary stress upon the fact that the new landlord had thought fit to interfere again, and had accordingly applied to the Bishop to get him to do the deed.

There was a great deal of excitement in the village that night. Wild groups gathered together and eagerly discussed what was taking place, and one or two leading spirits — Shamus Moor amongst them—boldly avowed that something must be done — that until the meddling landlord was disposed of there would be no peace in Patrickstown. They ought to have taken the law into their own hands before, and shown the Sassenach that conduct such as his would not be tolerated. Success in one venture had given them a sort of fictitious courage. Having once played with fire, they were anxious to do so again ; so they sat and con-

fabulated, while Father Flannigan, walking in a state of spiritual frenzy from house to house, discussed affairs with his sheep.

Whether or not they arrived at any definite decision coming events will show. Our business at present is with Patrick O'Connor. After all, this poor fellow was the only real sufferer in the hostilities then pending. If the other tenants received no assistance from Mr O'Brien, they were in no such need. They had milk and meal to mix with their blighted potatoes, but poor Patrick had none. Ever since that last interview with Mr O'Brien, he had been avoiding starvation very narrowly, but at last it seemed that he had met it face to face. Three of his hens had died from starvation; the other three were at the point of death;

while the pale pinched faces and emaciated bodies of his children told only too plainly of the agony through which they had come.

For four-and-twenty hours poor Patrick had not tasted food. That very morning he had boiled his last few potatoes, and with hungry eyes had watched his children eat. Now they were crying with the hunger again, and he had neither bite nor sup to give.

Patrick was at his wits' end what to do. He had very little reasoning power, as we have shown, but he knew for certain that if he sent his children to bed supperless that night, he would most likely wake and find one or more of them dead in the morning. He could not ask his neighbours for help; they were nearly as poor as he; moreover, he had already

tried them too often. There seemed now only one refuge—the landlord.

Hitherto he had shrunk from the idea of returning to Mr O'Brien, since by this time the poor fellow regarded his master as the worst enemy he had in the world—as the tyrant who had first tried to separate him from his children, and was now determined to exile him from his land. But beggars cannot be choosers; and no sooner did Patrick arrive at his last mouthful, and again behold his famished children crying from lack of food, than he determined to go to the enemy again for succour.

It was a dark, dreary night, and bitterly cold. The first frost of winter had bitten the land, and as the poor wretch shuffled along, huddling his rags about him, he felt the chilly touch of the

wind nip his poorly - covered bones, and increase the inward craving for sustenance. He entered the kitchen of Cragduff House with a slouching, shuffling gait—the effect partly of nervousness, partly of fear—and to his surprise he was again summarily introduced into Mr O'Brien's presence.

The last-named gentleman believing that he had brought his unruly tenant into submission, greeted him with these words,—

‘Well, so you have come to your senses at last! when am I to have possession of your hut?’

A look of the most mortal horror and ferocity crossed the man's face. Suddenly forgetting the real object of his visit, he exclaimed,—

‘Sure, yer honour, I cannot go at all.

You'll nivir have the heart to turn me out; we're starving—starving for the bite o' bread, and that's the raal truth !'

'If you were half as badly off as you pretend to be,' said Mr O'Brien, noting the terrible look on the man's haggard face, 'it might be better for you! A more stubborn, unmanageable lot of people I never met in my life. You are your own worst enemies, as you will discover ere long!'

'I thought, may be,' said Patrick, making a tremendous effort to subdue his emotion, 'that yer honour might give me a little help!'

'Then you were wrong,' said Mr O'Brien; 'I am a man of my word, as you will find. I said once before that I would give you no further assistance, and I meant it!'

And while poor Patrick, with clenched hand and teeth, slunk towards the door. Mr O'Brien's thoughts reverted to the last interview which he had had with this man, and to the attack which had followed it; and instead of calling the man back as he at one moment felt half-inclined to do, and, tendering the help which he solicited, he remained stern and unmoved to the last.

‘That fellow is a consummate scoundrel,’ he said to himself as the door closed. ‘If I hadn’t had a specimen of him at the trial I believe he would succeed in deceiving me; but, thank God, I’ve got my eye upon him, and if he tries any more of his tricks he shall be made to suffer!’

Meanwhile Patrick O'Connor, heart-sick, famished, and cold, trudged along

over the frozen hills towards his wretched home. A succession of terrible thoughts confused his brain ; but it was not until he had reached his own hearth, not until he met the eager expectant looks of his ragged children, not until he noted the scalding tears which filled their eyes as they beheld his empty hands, that the full horror of his position came upon him. He sat down, despondent and despairing, and as he did so, there entered his brain the thought which had occurred to him once before, *i.e.*, whether or not it would be legitimate for him to strike at the life of a man who had struck so cruelly at his own. The thought was not new to him this time, therefore it failed to startle him so deeply or to be dismissed so summarily as before.

About midnight that night Mr O'Brien

was awakened from his sleep by the restless yelping of a dog which was chained in a kennel at the back of the house, and listening intently he fancied that he heard footsteps upon the gravel beneath his window. Immediately divining that some danger was at hand, and not wishing to disturb the house or alarm his daughter, he left his bed, pulled on some clothes, and taking a loaded revolver in his hand, noiselessly descended the stairs.

When he reached the kitchen door the stifled groans and yelps of his dog, together with a peculiar kicking and plunging sound, made him think that serious harm was being done, and without a thought for his own personal safety, he withdrew the bolts and threw the door wide open. Immediately his eye fell

upon the figure of a man, muffled and disguised, who was creeping from the stable.

Mr O'Brien sprang forward, but the man, eluding his grasp, set off at lightning speed and disappeared. For a moment Mr O'Brien stood stunned, the next he set off in mad pursuit of the fugitive. There was no trace of him anywhere. Darkness hung dense above the earth, and not a single ray of light gleamed from the shadows of the hills. After the first heat of rage and surprise were over, Mr O'Brien paused, and perceiving the folly of this wild-goose chase, turned his steps towards home.

The noise of the scuffle, and the cries, had awakened his household, and when he got back, he was received with a joyful scream by Kate.

To his horror and indignation he saw

his dog lying lifeless upon the ground ; while, on examination of the premises, he found that his stable door had been broken open, and that a valuable horse, cruelly mutilated, was struggling in the last agonies of death.





CHAPTER XXV.

A SUPPLICANT.

WHEN the grey light of dawn crept in at Patrick O'Connor's cabin-door, it found him huddled together upon his chilly hearth, watching the faces of his sleeping children, and wondering what in the world he was to do to obtain for them sufficient food to keep them alive. How long he had been speculating thus we cannot say, we only know that when day came, he had arrived at no satisfactory conclusion; nor indeed had he a few hours later, when his cabin door was

violently thrown open, and there appeared before him no less a person than the 'master' himself.

Pale as death, and with ungovernable anger darting from his eyes, Mr O'Brien stood before the crouching creature, as if he would like to strike him down. So appalled was Patrick by this apparition, that though his lips moved, he could not utter a single word.

Not even when he heard himself apostrophised with all sorts of angry epithets, not even when Mr O'Brien seemed about to spring bodily at his throat, could he find speech—he could only stare in stolid silence still.

'Why don't you speak,' said Mr O'Brien, at length, 'and save your wretched children, if you have any humanity in you at all? Come man, make a clean breast of it—con-

fess it all to me, and I'll see that *they* don't suffer !'

'And what would I confess, yer honour ?' asked Patrick, aghast.

'Confess—why, the truth, if for once in your life you can tell the truth. Confess it was *you* who brutally destroyed my poor animals last night, and no doubt, if your courage hadn't failed, you would have tried to murder *me* !'

'Is it *me* ?' exclaimed Patrick, staring with wild eyes upon his questioner. 'In troth, yer honour, I nivir done the likes o' that !'

'What, you actually mean to deny it ?'

'I do indeed, sor,' returned Patrick, steadfastly. 'Thank God Almighty, I nivir stirred from the house here the whole of the night.'

Without another word, Mr O'Brien turned

on his heel, and left the cabin. In his own mind he had no doubt that it was no other than Patrick O'Connor who was committing these outrages upon him, but the man's cunning arrangements, and stolid denials, put it beyond his power, to have him punished for his crime.

This second attack upon the house quite unnerved Miss O'Brien, for it plainly pointed out to her that it was against her father's life that the blows were now aimed. He had had two miraculous escapes—she believed that the third attack, if it could not be averted, would assuredly bring calamity upon his head. She therefore set to work to ward off the worst. She knew no one but Father Malloy to whom she could apply, so to Father Malloy she accordingly went.

The Priest was somewhat amazed to see

her, but he received her kindly enough, and listened with interest to her story ; but when she asked him if he could not assist her in discovering who the perpetrator of these attacks really was, he shook his head.

‘ My dear young lady, I am quite powerless ; I offered your father my advice,—I could do no more.’

‘ But I thought,’ said Kate, ‘ that you might get the people to confess to you, and so discover the name of the real culprit !’

The Priest's face grew very grave.

‘ You do not understand what you are saying, Miss O'Brien ; I cannot reveal the secrets of my Church. If the whole or any of these crimes were imparted to me under seal of confession, I should be compelled, much as it would pain me, to remain silent !’

‘No, surely not!’ replied Kate; ‘you surely would not let the entire population suffer, when by a word you could set things right?’

‘Young lady, you forget I am a Roman Catholic Priest. The secrets imparted to me in the confessional remain for ever unknown.’

‘Then you will do nothing to help us?’ exclaimed Kate; ‘you will let these murderous attacks go on?’

‘What can I do?’ returned the Priest. ‘If you will reflect a moment I am sure you will admit that I am not to blame. No one can regret these unfortunate proceedings more than I do myself. It is a great consolation to me that I have tried to avert them. Well, my advice is simple. If you have any influence with your father get him to leave Patrickstown as soon as

possible. It is perfectly evident that he will never get on personally with his tenants, and that a residence here will always be fraught with irritation to them and danger to himself !'

With this cheering advice the interview closed.





CHAPTER XXVI.

QUIET WATERS.

A WEEK of comparative calm followed these stirring events, and then the stormy wind began to blow up again.

There came an order from the Bishop for the immediate removal of Father Flannigan. The Curate was furious, and so were his people. One or two of the leading villagers went up for counsel to Father Malloy, but that worthy could only shake his head and repeat to them, with a good deal of emphasis, the simple facts of

the case, *i.e.*, that Mr O'Brien had written disparagingly to the Bishop of Father Flannigan, and so compassed his removal. Nay more, he himself had a letter in the Bishop's own hand, which he was good enough to read to them, and which stated clearly enough that after the continual complaints made by Mr O'Brien, Father Flannigan could not be suffered to remain in Patricks-town !

This piece of information wrought the fury of the people to the highest pitch, and directed it exactly whither Father Malloy wished it to go.

Mr O'Brien had certainly not anticipated a public scene when he had determined to quietly compass the removal of the Curate. He fancied that he was doing a good action, and befriending his wretched people, for he believed, and rightly, that no good

would ever come to the place while the Curate's influence lasted.

He was therefore fully as amazed as he was disgusted, when, on the day appointed for the Curate's removal, he saw the whole of the villagers turn out *en masse*, and, surrounding the man with wild cries, implore his parting blessing. Acting upon the advice of his servant, Mr O'Brien kept to the house that day, and as soon as he could decently do so he had the iron shutters and doors closed, and everything made secure. Then he sat down beside his daughter.

'Why, Kate, my darling,' he said, in a lighter voice than he had used for some time, 'how pale and ill you are looking. What is the matter with you?'

In a moment tears filled the girl's eyes, and she had great difficulty in stifling a sob!

‘It is so wearing to live like this,’ she said. ‘Oh, papa, I am sorry we ever came here. I think it would have been better for us, and better for the people too, if we had stayed away!’

‘Why, Kate, you are growing a coward!’

‘I wish you were one, papa, and then I might persuade you to go away.’

Then, in her anxiety for her father’s safety, Kate told him of the interview which she had had with the Parish Priest, and of his final advice.

‘If one thing more than another would make me stop, it would be that man’s eagerness for me to go!’ said Mr O’Brien decidedly. ‘Never go to him for advice again, Kate. With all his quiet demeanour, and despite his seemingly exemplary conduct, I believe he is at heart a bigger scoundrel than the man who

was turned away to-day. Ever since he has been here his work has been that of steady repression, and he hates the innovation of anything like knowledge into his territory. If it hadn't been for him, and such as he, Patrickstown would not be the ignorant, poverty-stricken, benighted place it is. Depend upon it, our friend in the train was right; so long as we have Protestant owners for the land and Catholic priests for the people, poor Ireland will be in a bad way!'

'And if the land was owned by Roman Catholics, papa?'

'Why, then it would be ten times worse, my dear. Then there would not even be any attempt at improvements, and the wretched people would have no ghost of a chance of ever being one grain better than they are!'

By about ten o'clock at night the excitement in the village had somewhat subsided, and Patrick O'Connor, who had been nursing a sick child all day, went up to Cragduff House to again solicit help. At first Mr O'Brien seemed inclined to give the man some curt refusal, but at Kate's entreaty, on hearing the fact of the child's illness, he not only gave a liberal supply of food, but promised that Kate should visit the house on the following day. Although Mr O'Brien was a man who would keenly remember and bitterly resent a wrong, he had a heart capable of feeling pity. Patrick's forlorn appearance and wild tale of woe had called forth that pity at last. Moreover, Mr O'Brien had come to the conclusion that it behoved him to set his wretched tenant a good example—

in a word, to extend the hand of friendship to his enemies as well as his friends, and cap this short sharp war with a long reign of peace. So poor Patrick went away bearing his load to the sickly half-starved child at home. The next day Miss O'Brien went down to the house, and finding that the whole of Patrick's family were suffering from slow starvation, she asked her father to give them a weekly allowance, which he accordingly did.





CHAPTER XXVII.

‘DON’T GO OUT TO-NIGHT.’

THE removal of Father Flannigan proved beneficial to Patrickstown. The people, when once freed from his influence, seemed quiet and well conducted enough, and Mr O’Brien now got on with them considerably better than he had ever dared to hope. At first he had feared that they might be inclined to resent the part which he had taken in the proceedings, but such suspicions were quickly dispelled from his mind. His tenants

were not only obedient to all his wishes, but cringingly civil to both himself and his agent, and even when, about a fortnight after the Curate's removal, news reached the little village that Father Flannigan had quitted the Priesthood, and was living in a wretched hut near the town of Ballyferry, no sign came over their stolid faces, and no word either of approval or disgust escaped their sullen lips.

Things indeed were going so smoothly that Mr O'Brien—in his innocence—inwardly congratulated himself, believing the rubicon to be passed.

The winter, which had been ushered in with a whirlwind of hail, continued most bitter. Frost after frost nipped the spongy ground, snow fell, and bitter east winds blew over the hills with

hurricanes of blinding sleet. Then the storms abated, and for several weeks the land lay under the hard hand of frost again.

The shivering tenants worked hard at their master's bidding, and the land was improving vastly. Several new houses had been built, and the miserable cow sheds had been plastered up and made cosy for the cattle; well-made trenches and ditches marked off the separate portions of the land, and in answer to Mr O'Brien's importunities the Priest had at length set a few men to work upon the unfinished school. Altogether, as we have said, things were proceeding—greatly to Mr O'Brien's delight—as well as he had ever hoped them to do.

Thus encouraged, he repeated the offer which he had made to his tenants before,

i.e., to allow them to live rent free for two or three years, if, during that time, they would work conscientiously and well to improve the impoverished land. This time the offer was accepted. Delighted at his success, Mr O'Brien determined to have the agreements drawn out and the whole affair concluded without loss of time. So the greater part of one day Mr O'Brien and MacCollop devoted to drawing out the deeds, and when all was finished they put them away to be signed on the morrow.

The agent had dined at Cragduff House that night, but had left as soon as dinner was over, and when he was gone, Mr O'Brien and Kate drew their easy-chairs up to the fire, and sat down to discuss their future plans. It was a bleak, chilly night; the wind wailed dismally

around the house, and now and again large hailstones were beaten against the panes.

‘It’s a cold night,’ said Mr O’Brien, shivering. ‘I believe if I hadn’t plastered up the cow-sheds, half the cattle in the village would have died before the winter was through.’

Kate did not reply. She was gazing thoughtfully into the blazing fire.

‘I think, Kate,’ continued Mr O’Brien after a pause, ‘that when the school opens you ought to give a few prizes every quarter. It would be some inducement for the poor children to get on.’

‘So I will, papa.’

‘What a pity all these things were not done before. To think of generations of people living here with no more en-

lightenment than cattle! Poor things, poor things! . . . God bless my soul, man, what do you want?'

The last words were uttered in consternation, and the speaker leapt from his chair as if he had been shot. While carelessly turning his head towards the door, he had beheld a white face in the doorway, and a pair of wild eyes staring fixedly into his.

With a low cry, Kate leapt to her feet too, and stood confronting none other than Patrick O'Connor. Wild and ragged, shivering with cold, and drenched with the chilly drops of sleet, he stood staring like some wild beast at bay, his hands clenching and opening convulsively, his eyes fixed upon Mr O'Brien, but his lips uttering no sound.

'How did you get in here?' asked Mr

O'Brien sharply, when he had recovered from his temporary affright.

'I jist walked in through the kitchen, yer honour,' returned Patrick quietly, rubbing the cuff of his ragged coat across his forehead to wipe away the clammy rain. 'The sarvants is out o' the way, and when I knocked they didn't come.'

'Why, you are trembling like a leaf; are you cold?' asked Kate.

'I am, miss,' returned Patrick, gazing uneasily from side to side.

'What have you come here for; do you want *me*?' asked Mr O'Brien.

'I do, yer honour.'

Mr O'Brien waited for an explanation, but as none came, as the man stood staring with wandering eyes, he asked again,—

'Well, what do you want me for? Come, speak out!'

Again that uneasy look round the room — again that convulsive shiver, which seemed to grip the man's whole frame. His sunken cheeks grew white as death, and when he spoke it was as if the words were being dragged out of him.

'My little child is worse. I thought maybe yer honour would just step down to see him.'

'Impossible!' returned Mr O'Brien. 'I am not a doctor, and I cannot do your child any good.'

'That's true enough, sor.'

Mr O'Brien stood for a few moments regarding the wretched figure. He seemed to understand now the reason of the ghastly cheeks, the restless, uneasy glances and shivering form, and as he looked he thought he saw tears start to the man's eyes.

‘Well, well,’ he said; ‘I’ll come down if you think I can do any good.’

He stepped forward to get his great-coat from the hall; and as he did so, Patrick threw up his arms like a wild creature, as if to bar his way.

‘Don’t go, yer honour, don’t go!’ he cried in a wild, wailing tone.

‘Why, what is the meaning of all this?’ asked Mr O’Brien, amazed.

‘’Twas not in airnist, I was,’ said Patrick hurriedly; ‘God bless yer honour for what ye said, but ’twas only jokin’ I was when I axed ye to come out in the cold. You’ll see the little child to-morrow, God bless ye!’

Being quite unable to account for this strange behaviour on the part of his tenant, Mr O’Brien thought it best to let it pass, so, after giving Patrick something

for his supper, and wishing him good night, he returned again to his comfortable arm-chair.

'What in the world is happening to that man, Kate?' he asked of his daughter, when he thought Patrick must be on his way home.

'Indeed I don't know, papa,' returned the girl; 'sometimes I think he is really going insane, for he does such unaccountable things. Why, only the other day, when I offered some bread to one of his children, he seized it from my hand, threw it away, and then sank at my feet and cried, oh, so piteously, it broke my heart to see him!'

Mr O'Brien said nothing. In this war with his tenants, he did not altogether hold himself blameless. In the heat of anger and opposition he had been

forced into doing things which, in his saner and cooler moments, when his actions had been tempered with human sympathy, he would never have contemplated. Many a time had his conscience smitten him for the way in which he had treated this wretched man, and by his blind anger and determination almost brought him to death's door!

How vain are all such regrets, and yet how the memories of our misdeeds haunt us when the hour of retribution has come!

As Mr O'Brien sat looking into the fire that night, he saw nothing but the haggard face and wild eyes of Patrick O'Connor, thought of nothing but the man's wailing cry for mercy when he had told him he must be evicted.

'I think I'll go, Kate,' he said; rising abruptly.

'Where?' asked Kate, amazed.

'To see that man's child. I should never forgive myself if it was dead in the morning!'

'But it is such a wretched night, papa. Just hear how the wind wails, and just now the hail was like to break the window in.'

'Pooh, it won't wet my ulster through; half-an-hour will take me there and back, and I shall sleep with an easier mind.'

So Mr O'Brien pulled on his overcoat, his thick boots, and felt hat, and buttoned up to the throat, without even a stick or a dog to protect him, he kissed Kate fondly on the lips and passed out into the night, alone.





CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FACE IN THE SNOW.

WHEN he was gone, Kate walked for a time restlessly about the room, listening to the wind, which seemed to be whistling around the house with increased violence ; to the hail-stones which now and again rattled on the pane, while her thoughts were busy with the future and the past.

Presently she paused before the books which lined one half of the walls, and running her slender finger along the backs pulled one forth.

Her father, she reflected, would not return for an hour, at any rate, and she might employ the time in reading, so she threw a little more turf on the fire, pulled the great candelabra nearer to her, and sinking back in her chair, put her feet on the fender and opened the volume. It was the very one which she had bought when her father had told her that they were coming to live in Patrickstown. *Sketches of the North-West Coast of Ireland*, she read, and was soon plunged into an elaborate description of the beauties of the little village. It was an amusing work, and Kate became interested, and eagerly reading on forgot to listen to the shrilly whistling wind, to the hailstones which rattled like small pebbles on the pane; she did not even wonder what was keeping her father so long away. Presently

the clock chiming dismally from the hall made her drop her book with a start.

‘He has been gone two hours,’ she said to herself; gazing uneasily about the room, and noting for the first time how the wind had risen since he went away. It shrieked around the house with wild cries, rattling the hailstones about, shaking at the doors and sweeping down the chimney, scattered the burning ashes of the fire. Kate went to the window, pulled back the heavy crimson curtains, unfastened the great iron shutters, and shading her eyes from the light of the room, looked out.

What a night! The wind whistling madly over land and sea whitened the frozen air with foam and hail; the sea rose like a great white wall, and black clouds were driving tempestuously across the heavens. It seemed to Kate that her

father could hardly get home through such a hurricane; undoubtedly he was sitting by the poor sick child waiting for a lull in the storm. This thought reassured her. With a sigh she closed the heavy shutters, drew the curtains and sat down again to her book.

But although she held it before her eyes with steady persistence and turned over leaf after leaf, she could not again resume the thread of the narrative. Her soul was strangely restless to-night, her thoughts foreboding ill. So she replaced the book in its niche in the wall and wandered uneasily about the room, while the ticking of the clock vibrated through her brain and she heard the hours chimed forth—and still he did not come.

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The servants had all gone to bed, so

poor Kate paced the cold house all that night alone, but when the first streak of dawn crept coldly in, she opened the door, and without hat or cloak to keep her from the cold, rushed out into the chill morning air. Her clasped fingers were cold as ice, her heart was throbbing convulsively—she hardly knew whither her footsteps fell, but she mechanically took the road to Pat O'Connor's hut. Yes, the road which she had trod so often with meat and drink for the poor little starving mouths which were housed down there. She went—how she knew not—for she was only conscious of mechanically turning her head from side to side—then still in a strange wild dream she found herself kneeling upon the heather beside what?—her *father!* Could that be he? that thing with the glaring eyes, the set teeth, and bloody distorted features?

‘Father, father!’ those were the only words which escaped from the girl’s white lips. As the cry of anguish ascended to heaven, she fell upon the earth as cold as any stone.





CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ARREST.

FATHER MALLOY was not an early riser. When, therefore, he stepped out of his bedroom at ten o'clock that morning, the news which was spreading like fire over the village met him face to face. It came from the lips of Shamus Moor.

Shamus said that as he was going up to the agent's that morning to consult him about some matter connected with his land lease, he had found Mr O'Brien lying stone dead on the ground, and his daughter in

a fainting fit beside him. He had at once given the alarm and brought the police to the spot.

As soon as the Priest had breakfasted, he put on his hat, took his breviary in his hand, and went down to Cragduff House to learn more. To judge from the faces of the peasantry, it seemed incredible that such a bloody deed could possibly have been done. No one seemed surprised, no one seemed shocked. Indeed, as Shamus Moor conducted his pastor to the spot where he had found his dead master lying, and pointed out the clotted blood and hair which stained the heather, the Priest might have seen unmistakable gleams of delight darting from the man's eyes.

'That's the very spot, yer riv'rence,' said the man; 'the hatchet was lying here.. 'Twas wid that they done it. Just

smashed his skull in, and chopped his head well nigh into two pieces !'

The Priest shivered, and, turning away, went straight to Cragduff House.

Here all was quiet and sad enough. All the windows were curtained, and Father Malloy, passing in at the open door, heard voices proceeding from only one room. Following the direction of the sounds, the Priest found himself in a good-sized bed-chamber, gazing upon a sight which made even *his* cheek turn pale.

Stretched upon the bed, beneath a snow-white sheet, which just revealed the outlines of his form, was Mr O'Brien. A bloody handkerchief was bound tight round his head, and a thin crimson thread was dried upon his brow and upon the closed lids of his eyes. Near to the bed stood a group of three policemen, one of whom held in his

hand a hatchet, to which was frozen clotted masses of blood and hair. Another was questioning Kate O'Brien, who sat by, pale as death, but quite calm ; while the other had placed a detaining hand upon a human figure, clad in soaking rags, which crouched at the foot of the bed, its gaunt hands covering its face, its emaciated body shivering with convulsive sobs and moans. No sooner did the Priest utter a word than the figure raised its head, and disclosed the face, livid and distorted, of Patrick O'Connor.

‘Yer riv’rence,’ moaned Patrick, crawling over like a reptile, and crouching at his pastor’s feet, ‘I never done that, yer riv’rence. Save me, for God Almighty’s sake !’

But the poor wretch’s feeble protestations are unheeded. Is not that hatchet which

was found beside the dead man's body, and which is still discoloured with newly-shed blood, branded with his own name. Is not Kate O'Brien there to swear that it was he and no other who lured her father from the house last night under the pretence of tending a sick child, who was discovered to be in fair health, and did the police not find him creeping from the spot. The proofs are undeniable. Father Malloy can say nothing, and so poor Patrick is handcuffed and taken off to the strong room of the barrack, there to lie until it is convenient to remove him to the county jail.

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The next day the coroner arrived, and the inquest was held. Upon the evidence produced thereat, it was declared that Mr O'Brien had met his death by violence. A


verdict of wilful murder was therefore returned, and as the suspicion attached to poor Patrick amounted almost to certainty, he was forthwith removed to the county jail, there to be tried during the approaching sessions before a judge and jury.





CHAPTER XXX.

GUILTY.

N the opening of the Castlebar Sessions, some two months subsequent to the occurrence of the events related in our last chapter, the first important case brought forward for trial was the murder of Mr O'Brien. The case was looked for with gloomy interest. Public excitement had been kept alive by various notices which had been distributed about the town, threatening with Mr O'Brien's fate any one of those men who would dare to convict the prisoner.

Though the police had been on the alert, the other offenders still roamed free. The prosecutors were inexorable. Despite the many bloody threats which they received, they worked with steady persistence, so that when all was ready, they had got a pretty clear case before them.

The trial came on on the fifteenth of the month.

By ten o'clock in the morning the court was crammed. The judge was on his bench, the jury were sworn, and the barristers were around the table, while amongst the solicitors in the well, with his black bag open before him, was none other than our old friend Mr O'Flaherty, of O'Flaherty and Skinem, who had been working hard for the prosecution.

All was ready now. The judge was

blinking with owl-like placidity from his seat; the jury were comfortably settled in their box—such a jury as satisfied even Mr O'Flaherty's voracious demands—stern, determined men, impervious to threats or promises, and inclining to justice throughout; and the counsel was fluttering his papers to begin.

‘Call Patrick O'Connor!’

Amidst a dense silence, and a suppressed throbbing of excitement, poor Patrick was placed in the dock. No sooner did he make his appearance than a murmur ran through the court—a murmur which might mean either approval or disgust, or both. The public had come to the court to see a species of monster; they beheld a pallid, broken-down, but, as they conceived, truculent-looking man, who slouched into the court, and cast his wild glances around

upon the crowd of human faces. For one moment his face remained dull ; then a look of reassurance passed over his haggard features. In the gallery were several of the Patrickstown boys, gazing sympathetically at him, and there, too, most prominent of all, was the patriarchal head of Father Malloy.

At the sight of his Priest, Patrick pulled himself together at once, threw up his head, and walked with a firm step into the dock.

Then the case commenced. The counsel for the prosecution proceeded to give a brief sketch of the facts—of Mr O'Brien's residence in Patrickstown ; of his eagerness to improve the place and the people ; of the success which attended these philanthropic efforts, of his special kindness to the prisoner ; and of the steady way in which some inhuman person (the prisoner in all probability) had

been working to destroy him. On one occasion, stones had been cast through the window into the room in which the deceased was sitting; on another occasion, following shortly after, the same brutal hand had gone the length of torturing and killing a horse and a dog belonging to deceased, and afterwards firing at himself with his own revolver. These events, argued the counsel, were enough to show that the hideous crime which followed had been deliberately planned for months before it was committed; and from evidence which he meant to make clear to the jury—there could not possibly be a doubt as to the fact that the hand which had perpetrated those brutalities was stained with the most cowardly murder that had been committed in the country for years, and was none other in fact than the hand of the prisoner.

Here Patrick, who had been listening in a dazed sort of way to this discourse, called out,—

‘Your honour, it’s a lie. I never done it. I declare to God I never did!’

This unseemly interruption was quickly suppressed by the court. Silence being again restored, the counsel proceeded. He dwelt at length upon the benefits which the prisoner had derived from his master, and various other points, which made the case as black as possible. Then he folded up his brief, called his first witness, and Kate O’Brien stepped upon the witness table.

She was dressed in mourning, and heavily veiled—she held the back of the chair for support, but when she was questioned, she answered in a voice clear and straightforward, though broken now and then by tears. Her evidence, when sifted, went mainly to confirm

what the counsel had said. She described the shooting at the agent, and the lies which Patrick had told on that occasion ; then she detailed the attacks on Cragduff House, which invariably followed an interview with Patrick, and which, she now confessed, her father had always attributed to him, but through lack of evidence had been unable to trace home. Then she described the last night of all. Slowly, in low trembling tones, she answered the questions that were put ; and, as she did so, sobbing meanwhile, and not venturing to look at the prisoner, poor Patrick covered his face with his trembling hands, and moaned in anguish and despair.

Counsel—Now, Miss O'Brien, be kind enough to look upon the prisoner.

Kate clutched the chair nervously ; then with a trembling hand she raised her veil, and turned her white face slowly towards

the dock. As she did so Patrick's hands fell powerless at his sides, his wild eyes glared almost defiantly upon her, then he fell upon his knees.

O God, forgive me!' he moaned. 'Before God Almighty, I never meant to harm you!'

Kate turned away her face again, and the counsel continued,—

'Is that the man who fetched your father from home that night?'

Kate—It is!

Counsel—What reason did he give for fetching him?

Kate—He said that his child was ill.

Counsel—And was that true, so far as you know?

Kate—It was not. All his children were in their usual health.

At this a shiver went through the court,

and all eyes were turned upon the crouching prisoner. The counsel passed now to the murder. But here Kate entirely broke down, and after a few minutes she was suffered to depart.

The next witness called was Shamus Moor. He had only to depose as to the finding of the body and giving the alarm, and his part was done.

He entered the court with his eyes on the ground, and he kept them fixed there; but when his evidence was over, and he was about to step from the table, the prisoner, who could not be kept silent, reached out his hands and cried for help. Then it was that Shamus staggered like a drunken man, as if every word vibrated through his nerves like an electric shock. His face went livid, his eyes glared, and his knees trembled under him. But it was

only for a moment. When he recovered himself he muttered,—

‘It isn’t like an Irish jury to hang an innocent man!’

‘Leave the box, sir!’ said the counsel severely, and Shamus, glad of the reprieve, stepped from the table and disappeared.

Next the policeman was called, who deposed to the finding of the body. He also recognised the hatchet as the one bearing the prisoner’s name, which had been found beside the body, and upon the evidence of which he had taken the prisoner into custody.

Then rose the counsel for the defence. His case was a poor one, but he had worked hard at it, and, after all, there was something to be said. He began by showing Patrick in a new light—that of a poor, plodding creature, with a brain utterly incapable of

conceiving all these deep-dyed schemes which were laid at his door. For five-and-forty years he had dwelt in Patrickstown, and although during that time there had been riots there, and the village had been taxed for damage, Patrick's name had never once been tarnished with a breath of suspicion. He had ever lived decently, according to his lights, paying his rent regularly, and feeding and clothing his children, and he had never done harm to a single soul.

Then cautiously and insiduously the counsel proceeded. There could be no doubt, he hinted, with many a meaning glance at the jury, that Mr O'Brien had been a very *hard landlord*. He might call it economic to turn the poor Irishman out of the little homestead which his family had held for upwards of a hundred years, but he (the counsel) did not. It was the plea which too

many worked upon now-a-days—the poor Irish boy might dwell upon the soil while it was comparatively useless ; but once let it become of any value and he was turned away, no matter where, while a stranger stepped in and reaped the reward of his toil. If he happened to oppose this treatment he was punished ; if he complained he was laughed at ; if he rid himself of his tyrant he was hung—either way the poor Irishman suffered, and the usurper not only gained his ends, but was lauded as a philanthropist besides.

‘ Now it was well known that Mr O’Brien went in for improvements, and by so doing turned the hearts of all his tenantry against him. It was not merely one man, but many, who were involved in this matter. It was evident that plots were going on in the village ; and although the prisoner

was possibly cognisant of these, that did not prove that his was the hand which struck the blow. Who fired at the agent? Patrick O'Connor had never even been accused of that, and besides, at that time, what motive had he for committing murder? Why, he was almost the only man in the village who received real kindnesses from the family of Mr O'Brien, On the other hand, there was every inducement for the hand which had been raised against the agent to be subsequently directed against the master. Even when Patrick had been admitted into the conspirators' confidence, it was only as a decoy. If *he* had wanted to destroy Mr O'Brien, could he not have done so easily by concealing himself in the room, and coming out stealthily when all were at rest? Besides, his own actions spoke plainly for

themselves. Remorse had assailed him at the last, and he had earnestly begged his master not to follow him. Where would have been the necessity of that if he had held the weapon of death in his own hands, instead of possessing the knowledge that the murderers were awaiting them without ? His actions attested the truth. Had Mr O'Brien obeyed Patrick that night he would have been alive ; it was by disobeying him that he met his death.

It is impossible to follow the counsel through the labyrinths of a perfervid speech. Suffice it to say, that he said all that could be said in favour of poor Patrick. When he had finished, the public prosecutor briefly replied, the judge summed up, and the jury retired.

They were absent from the court about an hour. When at length they

returned, the silence in the court was oppressive.

‘Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?’ asked the judge.

The foreman of the jury, keeping his eyes fixed steadfastly upon the ground, replied in a low voice,—

‘Guilty, my lord.’

A groan came from the masses in the gallery,—a flutter ran through the body of the court. Then the judge, assuming the black cap, delivered the sentence of death.

‘And may God have mercy on your soul!’

As the solemn words were spoken, the prisoner, who had stood staring stupidly up at the judge while he delivered the sentence, clutched at the bar, and silently fainted away.





CHAPTER XXXI.

POOR PATRICK'S PILGRIMAGE ENDS.

WHEN poor Patrick recovered his senses, he found himself lying upon a bed of straw in a corner of the condemned cell. His limbs were trembling as with an ague fit, his teeth were chattering as with intense cold. It was quite dark all around him, but a thin stream of evening grey crept through the grated window of the prison, and lay, a thread of silver, upon the floor.

His brain was clouded still. After one quick, stupefied gaze around him, he covered

his face with his hands, and sat rocking himself and moaning like one in physical pain.

As yet, he was quite unable to grasp the full horror of his position; his mind was not sufficiently clear to think; he could only sit with closed eyes and buzzing brain until the torpor passed away.

Patrick had only been twenty-four hours in his cell, though it had seemed to him like twenty - four days, when the door opened and admitted the beloved form of his pastor. With a pitiful cry of welcome Patrick arose, and, tottering a few steps forward, fell trembling and moaning at the father's feet.

The Priest paused, his cheek turned pale, his hand was instinctively thrust forward as if in consolation. The sight of the starved, terror-stricken, woe-begone

creature was horrible enough, but the despairing moans which issued from the quivering lips were heart-rending.

‘Courage, Pat!’ murmured the Priest, laying his hand in saintly benediction upon his parishioner’s head. The words fell like balm upon the tortured creature’s soul.

Patrick raised his pale pinched face, clutched at the outstretched hand, and moistened it with his tears.

The Priest remained in the cell for about an hour. When he left, the prisoner was comparatively calm. He had filled his mind with superstitious comfort, and had crowned his goodness by promising to come again early the next day.

So, although Patrick’s bed was hard that night, and his poor bones ached woefully, his sleep was happier and more peaceful

than it had been for many months before ; for the beautiful vision of future bliss which the Priest had conjured up for him became a reality ; he felt that all his troubles were ended, and that he had at last found peace.

But before daybreak came the beautiful visions fled, and poor Patrick, awakening to hard reality again, moaned in mortal fear. As hour after hour went by his condition grew worse ; and when at length the Priest arrived, he found the task of soothing his parishioner harder than it had been before.

The days which followed were fraught with much anxiety. With the self-sacrificing devotion of his class, the Priest spent his days in the wretched condemned cell, trying to bring some light and comfort to the criminal's benighted soul.

Meanwhile, and during the hours of

Father Malloy's absence from the cell, other and counter influences were at work. At length the result of these counter influences came to light. One day, the second previous to that which had been appointed for the execution, there gradually got bruited abroad a rumour which made the heart of the Priest very faint with fear. The prisoner was going to turn Queen's evidence.

Queen's evidence !

The news spread abroad like wildfire. It was now confidently reported that Patrick O'Connor, though an accomplice before the fact, was not the chief agent in the murder of Mr O'Brien, and that on promise of a commutation of the capital punishment, he was prepared to expose the conspiracy and name the ringleaders.

Society breathed again. At last a whole viper's nest would be trampled out, and

life and property, by a scathing exposure, protected for the future.

A few hours later Father Malloy entered the condemned cell. His face was pale and sad to sternness; he gazed coldly, without a vestige of his usual kindness, on the mass of rags before him. The gaoler withdrew. The Priest waited patiently until the sobs which shook the emaciated body had somewhat subsided; then he touched Patrick on the shoulder.

The wretched man looked up, and their eyes met. With a wild moan, like one beseeching mercy, the prisoner fell upon his knees.

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Two days later, in the dim grey light of a wintry morning, Patrick O'Connor was led forth to die. At the last moment he had refused to speak a word to imperil

anybody but himself. No persuasions moved him now ; he had nothing whatever to reveal.

His face was ghastly pale as he tottered to the gallows in the prison-yard. By his side stalked Father Malloy, reading from the holy book. As he ascended the gallows steps, he clung piteously to his Priest, seeking his eyes for encouragement and consolation.

A few minutes later the black flag was hoisted on the gaol, and the small crowd of sympathisers waiting outside knew that Patrick O'Connor was dead.

Early in the day Father Malloy issued from the gaol. In a narrow street close by he was accosted by Shamus Moor, whose face showed great agitation, and who trembled violently.

‘ Well, yer riv’rence, did the poor boy spake ? Did he— ’

The Priest shook his head.

‘He died like a true Irishman. Peace
be with his soul!’

‘Amen!’ said Shamus, with a look of
intense relief; and touching his forelock,
he crept away.

That night the real murderers of Mr
O’Brien slept in peace!

THE END.

